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EDWARD C. ARMSTRONG

8

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

AND

HIS FIGURES OF SPEECH

BY

J. M. BURTON



PRINCETON, N. J.

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HIS FIGURES OF SPEECH

MACON, PROTAT FRÈRES, IMPRIMEURS.

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*Prepared as a doctoral dissertation and completed in 1916,
this monograph was laid aside in response to the more pres-
sing call of the hour. Its author now rests in the soil of
France, with an unbroken record of tranquil steadfastness
as student, as teacher, and as soldier. He died in the service
of his country at Vittel (Vosges), October 5, 1918.*

*In accord with the wish which he had expressed, the study
is hereby dedicated to his mother.*

H. De Balzac — est ses figures le mythe (un mythe)

Chapitre Ier Schéma et résumé statistique -

Chapitre II Analyse concrète des figures
le style de Balzac en elles-mêmes -

Chapitre III Analyse métaphorique des
images de Balzac par rapport
au texte -

Chapitre IV Les causes chez Balzac
de cet usage fréquent d'images
chez Balzac -

Chapitre V Rapports entre les images de
Balzac et ses idées chez
Balzac -

Chapitre VI Détails effets produits par
le style de Balzac -

**ARCHEVÈCHÉ
DE
BORDEAUX**

Le 25 Janvier 1955.

L'Archevêque de Bordeaux recommande avec une particulière insistance, à la bienveillance et à la générosité de tous, l'appel de M. l'Abbé DAUSSEUR, chargé de construire, pour la Cité des Castors de Pessac et les très importants lotissements de "l'Alouette", une église dont l'érection est urgente.

Que DIEU bénisse tous ceux qui aideront par leurs offrandes nos ouvriers bénévoles et courageux et permettront ainsi à une population très sympathique de posséder, au milieu de ses foyers, un autel, un tabernacle, un centre d'évangélisation!

‡ Paul RICHAUD,
Archevêque de Bordeaux,
Evêque de Bazas.

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CHAPTER I

OUTLINE AND STATISTICAL SUMMARY

The aim of this monograph is the study of a group of Honoré de Balzac's figures of speech, in order to fix as definitely as possible their relation to the man, to show how they derive from him and how they throw light on his complex nature, and to estimate their literary value. An investigation of the possible sources of Balzac's figures is not included; such an investigation, while it would have been desirable, is not indispensable to the purpose in view, for which interest is centered, not on the artistic manipulation of the individual figurative conceptions, but on the general lines of the author's choice of the comparisons and on the purposes for which he most frequently uses them.

The figures of speech form an interesting element of any style in which they are employed. Thus there have been numerous studies of their use by ancient and modern authors, but the treatises are frequently little more than catalogues of the figures, arranged according to the fields from which the comparisons are drawn. Such presentations aid us to judge the range of the author's knowledge and interest, the exactness of his observation, the power of his imagination, and his esthetic sense. But, apart from this, the figures of speech, presenting infinite possibilities of arbitrary variation, can be made to throw numerous side-lights on the most intimate phases of an author's personality, and from them we should be able to derive some generalized principles of figurative creation.

If it be true in a certain sense that the style is the man,
VIII. I

the same should be said even more positively of the figures of speech, an element of style in which the author is comparatively free from the restraint of convention and into which the rhythm of his thought is translated freely and often unconsciously. Bourget, in his essay on Stendhal, says : " La première question à se poser sur un auteur est celle-ci : quelles images ressuscitent dans la chambre noire de son cerveau, lorsqu'il ferme les yeux ? C'est l'élément premier de son talent. C'est son esprit même. Le reste n'est que de la mise en œuvre ! " Bourget is not specifically referring to figures of speech, but affirms that the kind of images — physical, intellectual, or emotional — that arise give an accurate index to the character of the mind ; a statement which we can accept if we do not attempt too rigid an application. But the way in which these images are associated with one another, the way in which they are paired off, should be still more instructive. We should be able to see what takes place in the author's mind when he wishes to describe a shabby parlor, a miser, a pure woman, or love in a young girl's breast. If there is no association of ideas, we have a literal description or account, but if there is, that association, reflected in the simile or metaphor, represents a definite psychological phenomenon.

With this principle in mind we wish to study the similes and metaphors of Balzac, for whom some such method is natural and even necessary, for his figures have no particular interest in themselves. Victor Hugo is an artist in imagery : we can take pleasure in reading selections from a catalogue of his figures without knowing the context, in the same way that we enjoy a snatch of song from an opera. Balzac's art is not refined to the point of being impersonal, of having a separate, self-sufficing existence ; it is indissolubly bound up with the man and his subject. He was guided by a happy instinct when he tried to fuse his work into a single whole, for there are few other cases where the author and his work

1. *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, I, p. 291.

form such a composite unit, and probably none where a single work loses more of its distinctive character by being isolated. Similarly for the figures of speech, their main interest comes from their relation to the author. In studying the character of the figures, the manner and purpose of their use, we gain an insight into certain phases of the intellect and personality of the man, a process which is readily merged with the reverse ; that of indicating how certain ideas, characteristics, infirmities perhaps, of the man are reflected in his figures and hence in his style. This will lead to some more general discussion of certain qualities of style in their relation to the author and in their effect on the reader.

When we recall that we are dealing with the author of the *Comédie humaine*, a limitation of the field is manifestly imposed, and I have selected the *Scènes de la Vie de province*, which include eleven novels, good, bad, and indifferent. They are almost coextensive with the period of Balzac's literary activity, and, what is much more important with an author who shows so little chronological development, they present striking examples of the most important phases of his genius. But for our present purposes we must have a more detailed examination of the figures than it is practicable to give to the whole of even this section : and so attention has been chiefly directed to three novels. The *Lys dans la vallée* gives us an excellent example of the poetic and romantic phase of Balzac and contains such a mass of figures that it is worthy of a separate treatment. *Un ménage de garçon* presents one of his famous monsters of iniquity and is an excellent illustration of the author's materialism, which descends frequently to vulgarity and triviality. Both of these are forceful books and reveal Balzac as a conscious and careful workman. The third novel, *Eugénie Grandet*, is a masterpiece in which the two phases of his work are fused, and for us is all the more interesting because it is here that he has shown the most self-restraint, that he has chastened his genius, and thus we may suppose that what we find in it represents a serious

purpose and is not the result of his having given rein to the fancies of the moment. The conclusions drawn from these three novels will be tested by examples from other novels, more especially from the *Scènes de la Vie de province*.

It has further been necessary to limit the kind of figures studied. As has already been indicated, the term "figure" is used in its most current acceptation, that is as including similes and metaphors, or in other words any expressed or implied comparison between objects or acts which belong to different categories or exist under different circumstances. If an inanimate object or a lower order of life is compared to man, we have a special form : personification. The other rhetorical figures such as apostrophe, interrogation, and even metonymy and synecdoche, are mere modes of expression or linguistic conveniences. Hyperbole and antithesis do express a certain attitude of mind, and we find them frequently employed by Balzac, but the principle back of the creation of the individual figures of either type is always the same, and nothing could be gained by a detailed study : the difference between two hyperboles for instance is merely one of degree.

But figurative expression has become such a vital part of the language that there are many comparisons, usually in the form of metaphors, which have ceased to be felt as such and have become the normal expression of the idea. They are translated directly into abstract concepts without evoking any image of the thing originally suggested as an analogical explanation of the object under discussion. *Jeter un regard, une douleur profonde, l'empreinte de mélancholie sur sa figure, épouser les intérêts de quelqu'un* evoke no image of the literal meanings, and the study of such dead figures belongs to the domain of semantics. It is sufficient to state here that Balzac, exceedingly given to all types of figurative expression, has frequent recourse to these banal figures. He shows an especial fondness for certain terms, such as *jeter, profond, froid*, and terms connected with the ideas suggested by *combat, lien* or *drame*.

It is often difficult to decide whether a given expression represents a personal imprint of the mind of the author or whether he has simply taken it already coined from the wealth of contemporary figurative language. In attempting to determine the extent of the personal element, I have made extensive use of French dictionaries, but have relied especially on the sixth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, which lies within the dates of the works studied and which gives a considerable number of figurative uses of words. We can at least be sure that an expression from the pen of Balzac, when recognized by this most conservative work, does not indicate any original creation on his part. Other elements must also be taken into account in our decisions. At the base of the figure of speech there is the idea of a comparison between two objects. The comparison may be new or rare, but this is not necessary in order that the figure have a stylistic and psychological significance. The most banal comparison may be revived and made real by a new form of expression. Further — and this is more important for Balzac — a banal figure becomes significant when it is prolonged by carrying out the comparison in detail, or when it is used over and over again. Briefly then, we wish to study those expressions of Balzac in which words are used in other than their usual relations, and in which, either on account of infrequency of the basal idea, or of insistence upon it by a new mode of expression, by prolongation, by frequent repetition, there is evidence that the concept of the thing under discussion does not stand alone in the mind of the author, but that it is associated with something else which he sees and which he wishes us to see on account of certain suggestive similarities. In the elimination of banal figures, the tests may be less rigidly applied to similes than to metaphors, since the naming and the expressed comparison of two objects indicate that both objects were in the mind of the author.

In order to formulate any general conclusions, it has been necessary to make a very careful classification of the figures,

the results of which are shown in the table that follows. The customary method of classifying figures of speech solely by the second term or source of the comparison is inadequate for our purposes, for we fail to grasp the stylistic and psycholog-

		STATISTICAL TABLE		COMPARISONS				Total
	of	to		Lys dans la vallée	Eugénie Grandet	Un ménage de garçon		
(I) man		{ (A) man.....	124	33	36	193		
			46	26	35	107		
			33	6	9	48		
			39	22	20	81		
II	{ { (a) human look (b) human voice	{ { (A) material phenom- ena	28	11	6	45		
			42	8	10	60		
III) spiritual phenom- ena		{ { (A) plants..... (B) fluids..... (C) flame.....	34	1	5	40		
			53	2	14	69		
			42	6	10	58		
		{ { (D) physiological phe- nomena..... (E) music..... (F) material phenom- ena in general...	81	4	24	109		
			9	0	2	11		
			103	7	35	143		
IV) abstract relations and conditions of man		{ { (A) physical relations and conditions..	79	41	17	137		
(V) acts		{ { A acts of similar nature.....	19	13	33	65		
VI) inanimate objects		{ { (A) inanimate objects (B) living beings....	41	17	20	78		
			31	14	9	54		
TOTAL.....			804	211	283	1300		

ical import of a comparison unless we take into consideration both terms and compare their real relation with that indicated by the figure of speech. I have adopted a grouping which seemed, after a study of the figures in these three novels, to facilitate best a comprehensive idea of the whole mass of

figures, of their individual character, and of the purpose for which they are used. All the figures will be grouped under six general headings corresponding to what Balzac wishes to describe; opposite each heading are classified as minutely as seemed profitable the second terms of the comparisons.

In the statistical summary given on page 6, I have included only those figures used by Balzac or by his spokesman Félix de Vandenesse: in this way I eliminate a disturbing element resulting from Balzac's attempt to characterize his men and women by their modes of expression. The figures used in dialogue will come up for their share of discussion later on in this study.

CHAPTER II

TOPICAL ANALYSIS OF BALZAC'S FIGURES OF SPEECH

In this chapter the comparisons are grouped according to the nature of their first term, and the chapter will serve largely as an interpretation of the statistical table given at the close of Chapter I.

GROUP I. — FIRST TERM : Man

In this group the figures, as expressed, treat of man as a physical organism, but the intellectual and spiritual sides are naturally present in the mind of the author and in many cases really form the basis of the comparison.

Group I, A. — Comparisons between human beings are very frequent in Balzac ; he describes the acts or the emotions of a character by comparing them to the acts or emotions of a person of different social status or under different circumstances. In many cases, of course, the similarity is so great that the comparison could hardly be called a figure of speech, and even those that I have listed, which are usually expressed in the form of similes, might be called with greater exactness analogies, in order to distinguish them from those figures in which there is more real imagery. In the *Lys dans la vallée* we find twenty-seven figures based on differences of age, sex, and physiological condition, among which the most interesting are the seventeen comparisons to children : “ Cet homme était devenu inquiet, comme l'enfant qui ne voit plus remuer le pauvre insecte qu'il tourmente ” (p. 576) ; “ La comtesse se leva par un mouvement d'impatience, comme un enfant qui veut un jouet ” (p. 627) ; “ Avec ce courage d'enfant qui ne doute de rien ” (p. 410) ; “ Aussitôt, comme un enfant qui, descendu dans un abîme en jouant, en cueillant des fleurs, voit

avec angoisse qu'il lui sera impossible de remonter, n'aperçoit plus le sol humain qu'à une distance infranchissable, se sent tout seul, à la nuit, et entend les hurlements sauvages, je compris que nous étions séparés par tout un monde" (p. 301). Forty-nine figures are based on social, political, economic, and racial distinctions, the soldier, the sovereign, and the slave offering the most frequent sources of comparison: "Comme l'enfant arraché par Napoléon aux tendres soins du logis, elle eût habitué ses pieds à marcher dans la boue et dans la neige, accoutumé son front aux boulets, toute sa personne à la passive obéissance du soldat" (p. 454); "Arabelle voulut montrer son pouvoir comme un sultan qui, pour prouver son adresse, s'amuse à décoller des innocents" (p. 602); "Un contentement semblable à celui de l'esclave qui trompe son maître" (p. 481).

A very interesting feature of this novel lies in the thirty-seven figures in which religious terms are used with reference to carnal man, especially to express love between the two sexes and its effects. Madame de Mortsau is a saint, a martyr, a nun: "La sainte qui souffrait son lent martyre à Clochegourde" (p. 566); "Sereine sur son bûcher de sainte et de martyre" (p. 461); "Attendant toujours une douleur nouvelle, comme les martyrs attendaient un nouveau coup" (p. 395). There are also specific Biblical references, as: "Couchée comme si elle avait été foudroyée par la voix qui terrassa saint Paul" (p. 585). But much more frequent and striking are the specific comparisons of the sensuous—if not the sensual—to the religious emotions; after catching the tears of Madame de Mortsau in his hand and drinking them, Félix says to her: "Voici la première, la sainte communion de l'amour. Oui, je viens de participer à vos douleurs, de m'unir à votre âme, comme nous nous unissons au Christ en buvant sa divine substance" (p. 459); or: "Elle qui avait tout laissé pour moi, comme on laisse tout pour Dieu" (p. 574); or: "Elle recevait nos adorations comme un prêtre reçoit l'encens à la messe" (p. 403). In addition to the references to the Bible mentioned

above, there are eleven allusions that may be classed as figures under this heading. They are drawn from Classic, from Italian, and from French sources, with one reference to *Don Quixote*, and they offer no special interest, with the exception perhaps of the two comparisons of Félix and Madame de Mor-sauf to Petrarch and Laura (pp. 469, 507).

In the other two novels the figures group themselves similarly except that there are almost no references to religion. In *Un ménage de garçon* there are four comparisons to children, and, more striking still, eight to the sick, dying, and dead : " Maigre comme l'est une étique deux heures avant sa mort " (p. 333) ; " Une femme, verte comme une noyée de deux jours " (p. 333). Fourteen have reference to the professions, with that of the soldier predominating : " Ce sang-froid de général en chef qui permet de conserver l'œil clair et l'intelligence nette au milieu du tourbillon des choses " (p. 130) ; " M. Hochon... passa l'assiette à travers la table au jeune peintre avec le silence et le sang-froid d'un vieux soldat qui se dit au commencement d'une bataille : " Aujourd'hui, je puis être tué " (p. 223) ; " Le père Rouget... vint dans la rue prendre Flore par la main, comme un avare eût fait pour son trésor " (p. 296). There are five allusions of no special interest, with the exception of two referring to recent French history and having a pretentious tone : " Flore tomba sous la domination de cet homme, comme la France était tombée sous celle de Napoléon " (p. 317) ; " En présence de cette agonie, le neveu restait impassible et froid comme les diplomates, en 1814, pendant les convulsions de la France impériale " (p. 317).

In *Eugénie Grandet* there are six comparisons to children : " J'écou...coute, répondit humblement le bonhomme en prenant la malicieuse contenance d'un enfant qui rit intérieurement de son professeur, tout en paraissant lui prêter la plus grande attention " (p. 303) ; " Les yeux attachés sur les louis, comme un enfant qui, au moment où il commence à voir, contemple stupidement le même objet ; et, comme à un enfant,

il lui échappait un sourire pénible" (p. 368); "A la vue de ses richesses, elle se mit à applaudir en battant des mains, comme un enfant forcé de perdre son trop-plein de joie dans les naïfs mouvements du corps" (p. 321). Eleven figures refer to professions, as the comparisons of the astute Grandet to an astronomer (p. 224) and to an alchemist (p. 262). More interesting here are those that refer to particular situations, and which have usually a pretentious character: "L'attente d'une mort ignominieuse et publique est moins horrible peut-être pour un condamné que ne l'était pour madame Grandet et pour sa fille l'attente des événements qui devaient terminer ce déjeuner de famille" (p. 345); "Certes, la Parisienne qui, pour faciliter la fuite de son amant, soutient de ses faibles bras une échelle de soie, ne montre pas plus de courage que n'en déployait Eugénie en remettant le sucre sur la table" (p. 283); "Mais, à la vérité, la vie des célèbres sœurs hongroises, attachées l'une à l'autre par une erreur de la nature, n'avait pas été plus intime que ne l'était celle d'Eugénie et de sa mère" (p. 277). In addition to the last-quoted figure there are eleven allusions, most of them of a rather pretentious nature. Eugénie is compared to the Venus of Milo, to the Jupiter of Phidias, and three times to the Virgin Mary. Similarly the Cruchots and the Des Grassins are the Medici and the Pazzi of Saur-mur.

In the comparisons between human beings, then, we find, as we should expect, that the professions play a considerable part. But considering the very small place that the child holds in the *Comédie humaine*, we are a little surprised to note the insistence on child life; the figures indicate that Balzac had observed rather closely the good and bad sides of child nature; and, in addition to the extended figures, there is a still larger number of cases in which *ensantin* or *d'enfant* is used with a psychological connotation. It is interesting to note here that Balzac in his correspondence is continually speaking of his own nature as being that of a child¹.

1. Cf. *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, I, pp. 489, 315, 337, etc.

Group I, B. — In view of Balzac's frequent statement of the correspondence between the human and animal species, we naturally look with interest to see how this idea finds expression in the figures of speech. We find that, though Balzac is fond of animalistic comparisons, he does not let his theory distort his sense of reality. A single animal could not represent a single man, unless its character were greatly enlarged or that of the man simplified ; much less could an animal represent a class or profession in human society. Thus, while one type of animalistic comparisons usually dominates for a character, others are regularly used to represent his various physical or other traits.

In the *Lys dans la vallée* the most striking trait is the frequent comparisons to birds : thirteen, nine having reference to Madame de Mortsau. These comparisons concern her movements : "Une femme...se posa près de moi par un mouvement d'oiseau qui s'abat sur son nid" (p. 408); more frequently it is her voice : "La voix de l'ange qui, par intervalles, s'élevait comme un chant de rossignol au moment où la pluie va cesser" (p. 449) ; or the comparison may be less external, more intellectual¹ : "Madame de Mortsau était le bengali transporté dans la froide Europe, tristement posé sur son bâton, muet et mourant dans sa cage où le garde un naturaliste" (p. 556). The other comparisons are rather well distributed over the animal kingdom ; the lion, tiger, wolf, monkey, dog, horse, serpent and insect are each represented by two or more figures, and most of them are applied to several of the characters. Madame de Mortsau has "cette expression de lionne au désespoir" (p. 349), while of Lady Dudley it is said that "semblable à la lionne qui a saisi dans sa gueule et rapporté dans son antre une proie à ronger, elle veillait à ce que rien ne troublât son bonheur, et me gardait comme une conquête insoumise" (p. 370). The most interesting, and the most

1. I use term "intellectual figure" of figures based on an intellectually conceived comparison as contrasted with figures based on purely external and physical similarities. The term is less liable to cause confusion than "logical".

suggestive of character, are those referring to M. de Mortsau, whom Balzac himself came to consider the most striking character of the book¹: "Je fus une pâture à ce lion sans ongles et sans crinière" (p. 443); "Ses yeux élincelèrent comme ceux des tigres" (p. 443); "Son visage ressemblait vaguement à celui d'un loup blanc qui a du sang au museau" (p. 426; cf. 496); "Ces sortes d'esprits se heurtent volontiers aux endroits où brille la lumière, ils y retournent toujours en bourdonnant sans rien pénétrer, et fatiguent l'âme comme les grosses mouches fatiguent l'oreille en fredonnant le long des vitres" (p. 539); "Le comte avait été, comme les mouches par un jour de grande chaleur, plus piquant, plus acerbe, plus changeant qu'à l'ordinaire" (p. 475).

The animalistic comparisons in *Un ménage de garçon* are well scattered over the animal kingdom, but they have almost always a decidedly pejorative value. The birds are usually birds of prey, but such comparisons are no more uncomplimentary than: "Elle était grasse comme une grive après la vendange" (p. 69); or: "Cet amour maternel... tout aussi nécessaire aux commencements de l'artiste que les soins de la poule à ses petits jusqu'à ce qu'ils aient des plumes" (p. 124). The effect produced seems to be that desired by Balzac. Rouget appears as a butterfly, and twice each as a horse, sheep, and dog, and the impression on us each time is about the same: "Semblable au papillon qui s'est pris les pattes dans la cire fondante d'une bougie, Rouget dissipia rapidement ses dernières forces" (p. 317); in the comparisons to dogs the idea of fidelity which usually dominates with Balzac, gives place to the idea of servility and submissiveness: "Sur le palier Jean-Jacques couché comme un chien" (p. 193); "Il guettait les mouvements de cette créature comme un chien guette les moindres gestes de son maître" (p. 205).

In *Eugénie Grandet* the keynote of Grandet's character seems to be expressed in the double figure: "Financièrement parlant, M. Grandet tenait du tigre et du boa: il savait se

1. *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, I, p. 328.

coucher, se blottir, envisager longtemps sa proie, sauter dessus ; puis il ouvrait la gueule de sa bourse, y engloutissait une charge d'écus, et se couchait tranquillement comme le serpent qui digère, impassible, froid, méthodique" (p. 223). The idea with reference to Grandet expressed in the figure persists throughout the book. The tiger appears in two other similes and to it may be related five metaphors such as : " Le beau marquisat de Froidfond fut alors convoyé vers l'œsophage de M. Grandet" (p. 230). Grandet's cruelty, cunning, and impassiveness, his glance that frightens or chills recall the figure of the serpent or the later one of the basilisk (p. 227). Eugénie is referred to most frequently as a bird with its light-hearted innocence or its sad fate : " Semblable à ces oiseaux victimes du haut prix auquel on les met et qu'ils ignorent" (p. 244). Madame Grandet has "une résignation d'insecte tourmenté par des enfants" (p. 238) ; and the same timid meekness is indicated by four other figures : *biche*, *mouette*, *souris*, and *agneau*. Nanon is compared five times to a faithful affectionate dog. Charles is described in the figures in contrast to the natives of Saumur ; he appears as a girafe — a curiosity — or "un colimaçon dans une ruche, ou...un paon dans quelque obscure basse-cour de village" (p. 246).

Group I, C. — The comparisons of man to the plant world have not the intellectual significance of the comparisons to animals and they are relatively infrequent in *Un ménage de garçon* and *Eugénie Grandet*, where they are nearly all based on outward appearance, usually color, with the exception of a few poetic figures in the latter novel : "La Descoings avait pris les tons mûrs d'une pomme de reinette à Pâques" (MG., p. 422) ; "Une vague ressemblance avec ces fruits cotonneux qui n'ont plus ni saveur ni suc" (EG., p. 237) ; "Cette physionomie calme, colorée, bordée d'une lueur comme une jolie fleur éclose" (EG., p. 268) ; "Probe autant qu'une fleur née au fond d'une forêt est délicate" (EG., p. 287).

In the *Lys dans la vallée* there are twenty-two comparisons of woman to a flower, eighteen of them referring directly to

Madame de Mortsau. A few refer to external appearance only, as : " La pâleur verdâtre des fleurs du magnolia quand elles s'entr'ouvrent " (p. 624); but they are usually more intellectual, and they present an elaborate development of the idea expressed in the title of the novel ; we see the flower under all conditions : " Le lys...broyé dans les rouages d'une machine en acier poli " (p. 471) ; " Cette fleur, incessamment fermée dans la froide atmosphère de son ménage, s'épanouit à mes regards " (p. 553) ; " Penchant la tête comme un lys trop chargé de pluie " (p. 573) ; " Le lys de cette vallée où elle croissait pour le ciel en la remplissant du parfum de ses vertus " (p. 411) ; " La plupart de mes idées...sont nées là, comme les parfums émanant des fleurs ; mais là verdoyait la plante inconnue qui jeta sur mon âme sa féconde poussière " (p. 422) ; " La renaissance de madame de Mortsau fut naturelle comme les effets du mois de mai sur les prairies, comme ceux du soleil sur les fleurs abattues " (p. 525). The other comparisons are to plants, trees or fruits : " Ce corps aussi délicat que l'est une plante venue en serre malgré les rigueurs d'un climat étranger " (p. 424) ; " Elle prenait l'attitude d'un saule pleureur " (p. 424) ; " Elle était mortifiée comme le fruit sur lequel les meurtrissures commencent à paraître et qu'un ver intérieur fait prématûrément blondir " (p. 578).

Group I, D. — The comparisons of man to inanimate objects are as a rule commonplace : they are based usually on similarity of color, form, or qualities of resistance, and interest us chiefly as they differ in the three novels, according to the choice of the object to which man is compared. In the *Lys dans la vallée*, the comparisons are naturally used for poetical effect and are frequently stock forms : " La peau était blanche comme une porcelaine éclairée par une lueur " (p. 424) ; " La raie blanche qui partageait ses cheveux en deux bandeaux semblables aux ailes d'un corbeau " (p. 424) ; " Après avoir effleuré le frais jasmin de sa peau et bu le lait de cette coupe pleine d'amour " (p. 423). In *Un ménage de garçon* the comparisons are chosen rather with the intention of producing

disgust or else an impression of strength: "Son teint couleur de pain d'épice" (p. 206); "Son crâne couleur beurre frais" (p. 147); "Les paupières étaient comme des pellicules d'œuf" (p. 333); "Un tas de linge et de vieilles robes les unes sur les autres, bordées de boue à cause de la saison, tout cela monté sur de grosses jambes" (p. 331); "Les muscles ne tressaillirent pas plus que s'ils eussent été de bronze" (p. 305). "Blancs et immobiles comme des statues de plâtre" (p. 281) forms a striking contrast with "aux jolies statuettes du moyen âge" or "les statues antiques" in the *Lys dans la vallée* (pp. 378, 420), a novel which does not, however, wholly restrict itself to poetic figures, since we find such expressions as: "Ces creux qui font ressembler la nuque de certaines femmes à des trones d'arbre" (p. 420). In addition to the contrast between the two novels noted, there are other features in the *Lys dans la vallée* that deserve mention: the frequent comparisons to works of art, as illustrated above, and to natural phenomena, such as sky, cloud, etc.: "Ce visage, serein comme un beau ciel après la tempête" (p. 630). In general the comparisons are not confined so strictly to purely physical properties.

Eugénie Grandet stands half-way between these two extremes; we find in it parallels for both types: "Leurs figures, aussi flétries que l'étaient leurs habits râpés, aussi plissées que leurs pantalons" (p. 250); "Sa face trouée comme une écumeoire" (p. 241); "Il restait inébranlable, âpre et froid comme une pile de granit" (p. 353); "Ses traits, les contours de sa tête... ressemblaient aux lignes d'horizon si doucement tranchées dans le lointain des lacs tranquilles" (p. 268). Pejorative figures, though not so brutal as in *Un ménage de garçon*, still predominate.

In general we may say that the comparisons to inanimate objects are striking; that they produce the impression which Balzac wished to give. Even the poetic comparisons, while not so original, are often very well chosen.

GROUP II. — FIRST TERM: Human Look or Voice

This group is in the nature of a transition between Group I and Group III. We are dealing with two physical attributes of man — look and speech — but both are considered here according to their moral significance, as expressing the soul of the actor or as affecting those about him.

Group II, A. — In the *Lys dans la vallée* the look is represented twenty times as a light or a flame: “ Je sentais en moi-même ce regard, il m'avait inondé de lumière ” (p. 446); “ De ses yeux sortaient deux rayons qui versaient la vie à cette pauvre faible créature ” (p. 438). In three figures the look is, as it were, personified by substituting it for the imagination: “ Mon regard se régalaient en glissant sur la belle parleuse, il pressait sa taille, baisait ses pieds ” (p. 419). The rest are more material expressions.

In *Un ménage de garçon* there are six comparisons to flame, while four give the impression of something hard and metallic: “ Un regard de plomb ” (p. 279), or “ Les teintes froides de l'acier ” (p. 269). The five comparisons to flame in *Eugénie Grandet* do not express the idea so baldly: “ La clarté magique de ses yeux, où scintillaient de jeunes pensées d'amour ” (p. 281).

Group II, B. — Speech is expressed in the *Lys dans la vallée* four times as light and eight times as a fluid: “ Sa voix qui pénétra mon âme et la remplit comme un rayon de soleil remplit et dore le cachot d'un prisonnier ” (p. 416); “ Quand j'eus subi le choc de ce torrent qui charria mille terreurs en mon âme ” (p. 402). Ten figures represent the speech as something that wounds: “ Tous ces mots étaient des coups de poignard froidement donnés aux endroits les plus sensibles ” (p. 580); “ Le dard envenimé de ses paroles ” (p. 617). Other types are represented by the following examples: (music — “ Un son de voix nouveau, comme si l'instrument eût perdu plusieurs cordes, et que les autres se fussent détendues ” (p. 562) :

sounds in nature) — “ Ce ton doux et bas qui faisait ressembler ses phrases à des flots menus, murmurés par la mer sur un sable fin ” (p. 489); (material objects) — “ La plaisanterie française est une dentelle avec laquelle les femmes savent embellir la joie qu'elles donnent ” (p. 602).

Un ménage de garçon contains one comparison to flame, the rest being to something of more solid texture, — cannon-ball, arrow, knife, — together with such expressions as : “ Elles avaient accouché de la réponse suivante ” (p. 234). *Eugénie Grandet* contains two comparisons to music ; the rest are materialistic though not brutally so, possessing in fact little originality : “ Le flux de mots où il noyait sa pensée ” (p. 227); “ Ces mots retentirent dans le cœur de la pauvre fille et y pesèrent de tout leur poids ” (p. 287).

GROUP III. — FIRST TERM: Spiritual Phenomena

This group has to do with the spiritual phenomena within the man, his emotions, desires, passions, thoughts, etc.

Group III, A. — The comparisons to plants form one of the most striking features of the *Lys dans la vallée*. This conception crops out persistently throughout the book, and the following examples will illustrate some of the varied conditions under which Balzac sees the flowers. “ Des tourments subis en silence par les âmes dont les racines tendres encore ne rencontrent que de durs cailloux dans le sol domestique, dont les premières frondaisons sont déchirées par des mains haineuses, dont les fleurs sont atteintes par la gelée au moment où elles s'ouvrent ” (p. 394); “ Ma virilité qui poussait tardivement ses rameaux verts ” (p. 404); “ Espérances cultivées sans fruit, incessamment replantées et déracinées ” (p. 618); “ S'il y avait en son cœur des endroits friables où je pusse attacher quelques rameaux d'affection ” (p. 405); “ D'inépuisables exhalations remueront au fond de votre cœur les roses en bouton que la pudeur y écrase ” (p. 480); “ Il respira dans cette vallée les enivrantes odeurs d'une espérance fleurie ”

(p. 435); (*in the autumn*) "L'âme rembrunie" (p. 506); "Ainsi, des orages de plus en plus troubles et chargés de graviers déracinaient par leurs vagues après les espérances les plus profondément plantées dans son cœur" (p. 564); "L'ouragan de l'infidélité semblable à ces crues de la Loire qui ensablent à jamais une terre, avait passé sur son âme en faisant un désert là où verdoyait d'opulentes prairies" (p. 573). Such comparisons, which differ only in mode of expression from many of those listed under Group I, C, appear only sporadically in the other two novels.

Group III, B. — The comparisons to fluids in the *Lys dans la vallée* may be divided into three general classes, according to whether the conception is that of a fluid within the soul, a fluid in which the soul bathes, or a fluid in the more general sense, including electricity and effluvia. "Les sentiments courent toujours vifs dans ces ruisseaux creusés qui retiennent les eaux, les purisent, rafraîchissent le cœur et fertilisent la vie" (p. 563); "Abîmée en ces rêveries orageuses pendant lesquelles les pensées gonflent le sein, animent le front, viennent par vagues, jaillissent écumeuses" (p. 481); "Mon frère ainé semblait avoir absorbé le peu de maternité qu'elle avait au cœur" (p. 403); "Notre puissance s'échappe tout entière sans aliment, comme le sang par une blessure inconnue. La sensibilité coule à torrents" (p. 443); "Océan d'amour où qui n'a pas nagé ignorera toujours quelque chose de la poésie des sens" (p. 566); "Une de ces douceurs infinies qui sont à l'âme ce qu'est un bain pour le corps fatigué; l'âme est alors rafraîchie sur toutes ses surfaces, caressée dans ses plis les plus profonds" (p. 473); "Des pensées trempées de mélancolie tombèrent sur mon cœur comme une pluie fine et grise embrume un joli pays après quelque beau lever de soleil" (p. 427); "Rassembler dans l'air les effluves de cette âme" (p. 461).

We find the same type of figures in *Eugénie Grandet* in somewhat less pretentious form: "La compassion, excitée par le malheur de celui qu'elle aime, s'épanche dans le corps entier

d'une femme" (p. 276); "Aussi Charles... ne put-il se soustraire à l'influence des sentiments qui se dirigeaient vers lui en l'inondant, pour ainsi dire" (p. 280); "La pauvre fille... s'abandonna délicieusement au courant de l'amour; elle saisissait sa félicité comme un nageur saisit la branche de saule pour se tirer du fleuve et se reposer sur la rive" (p. 329); "L'âme a besoin d'absorber les sentiments d'une autre âme" (p. 371).

Group III, C. — The following examples illustrate the comparisons to flame or light in the *Lys dans la vallée*: "La constante émanation de son âme sur les siens, cette essence nourrissante épandue à flots comme le soleil émet sa lumière" (p. 421); "Elle me retira la lumière qui depuis six ans brillait sur ma vie" (p. 603); "Le désir serpenta dans mes veines comme le signal d'un feu de joie" (p. 476); "En retour de ma chair laissée en lambeaux dans son cœur, elle me versait des lueurs de ce divin amour" (p. 504); "Plusieurs pensées s'élevèrent en moi comme des lueurs" (p. 450).

The figures in the other novels are of a similar nature, all being more or less happy reworkings of the familiar conception of love, hate, pain, knowledge, etc., as light or fire. "Sa figure... parut s'éclairer aux rayons d'une pensée" (MG., p. 190); "Atteinte par un dernier rayon de maternité" (MG., p. 149); "Mille pensées confuses naissaient dans son âme, et y croissaient à mesure que croissaient au dehors les rayons du soleil" (EG., p. 266); "Dans la pure et monotone vie des jeunes filles, il vient une heure délicieuse où le soleil leur épanche ses rayons dans l'âme" (EG., p. 265).

Group III, D. — The physiological expressions in the novels fall into two classes. In the *Lys dans la vallée* forty-seven figures show a confusion between moral and physical conditions of man; the account of the soul-experiences of the two main characters frequently resembles a text-book of physiology: "Une grande quantité de fibres douloureuses qui obligeaient à prendre tant de précautions pour ne le point blesser" (p. 440); "Elle voulait du poivre, du piment pour la pâture du cœur" (p. 566); "Saignant, mais ayant mis un appa-

reil sur ses blessures" (p. 384); "Un cœur ulcéré... les affections entachées d'égoïsme" (p. 333). The conception that is involved in the above figures — that is, of the soul as a living physical organism — is definitely expressed in thirty-six figures; the idea of physical life is impressed the more forcibly in these because the soul is represented as being rather active than passive and appears usually as a man, occasionally as a bird or an animal: "Le corps succombe sous les étreintes de l'âme" (p. 469); "Amour horriblement ingrat, qui rit sur les cadavres de ceux qu'il tue" (p. 368); "Il s'éveillait en moi des idées qui glissaient comme des fantômes" (p. 436); "Que les maladies morales soient des créatures qui ont leurs appétits, leurs instincts, et veulent augmenter l'espace de leur empire comme un propriétaire veut augmenter son domaine" (p. 448); "Un visage où les ailes du plaisir avaient semé leur poussière diaprée" (p. 603); "Elle, si respectée par le plaisir, qui ne l'avait jamais enlacée de ses engourdisants replis" (p. 604).

The same two divisions appear in *Eugénie Grandet*. "Mais, à son insu, l'égoïsme lui avait été inoculé. Les germes de l'économie politique à l'usage du Parisien, latents en son cœur, ne devaient pas tarder à y fleurir" (p. 319); "Peut-être la profonde passion d'Eugénie devrait-elle être analysée dans ses fibrilles les plus délicates; car elle devint, diraient quelques railleur, une maladie" (p. 295); "Élever à la brochette l'avare de son héritière" (p. 237); "Elle avait conçu l'amour" (p. 339).

A great many of the figures in Group II contain the same conception as those of this class; if a look or a word acts like a dagger, it must have a physical organism on which to act. But any figure of speech, if carried to its logical conclusion, would necessitate a figurative interpretation of all related phenomena: it must be classified, then, according to the dominant idea. We must decide what phase of the subject the attention of the author was centered upon when he created the figure, and in the above-mentioned figures Balzac is evidently

trying at that particular moment to represent the look and the speech.

Group III, E. — The comparisons to music in *Eugénie Grandet* consist merely in the use of the musical terms *crescendo* (p. 247) and *rinforzando* (p. 261), the effect being rather comical. From the *Lys dans la vallée* the following are typical : “ L'interrogation brusque faite à un cœur, un coup donné pour savoir s'il résonne à l'unisson ” (p. 450); “ Les gradations... de la musique appliquées au concert de nos voluptés ” (p. 603).

Group III, F. — In this class are all the concrete expressions of the inner man which do not come under any of the headings above. The source of the comparison ranges from jewels, furniture, and weapons of defence to geometry and natural phenomena.

In the *Lys dans la vallée* we find nineteen figures referring to various kinds of cloth, thirteen to natural phenomena, and there are thirteen which treat of the heart as a place : “ La comtesse m'enveloppait dans les nourricières protections, dans les blanches draperies d'un amour tout maternel ” (p. 472); “ Leur indifférence, engendrée par les déceptions du passé, grossie des épaves limoneuses qu'ils en ramènent ” (p. 405); “ Elle entra dans les derniers replis de mon cœur, en tâchant d'y appliquer le sien ” (p. 504). Other typical examples are : “ A l'époque de la vie où, chez les autres hommes, les aspirées se fondent et les angles s'émoussent ” (p. 540); “ Mon amour, pris dans la religion comme une image d'argent dans du cristal ” (p. 463); “ L'avenir se meuble d'espérances ” (p. 524); “ Elle ouvre et ferme son cœur avec la facilité d'une mécanique anglaise ” (p. 611).

The figures in the other novels are of a very similar nature : “ Afin d'envelopper le cœur de cette pauvre mère dans un linceul brodé d'illusions ” (MG., p. 328); “ Le grain d'or que sa mère lui avait jeté au cœur, s'était étendu dans la filière parisienne ” (EG., p. 318); “ Grandet avait observé les variations atmosphériques des créanciers ” (EG., p. 336).

GROUP IV. — FIRST TERM : Abstract Relations and Conditions

The figures in this group consist in the representation of a state or act, purely moral or having moral significance, in terms of a corresponding physical circumstance or act. We are still dealing with spiritual phenomena but the point of view is more external. Also the second term of the comparison comes nearer to being purely symbolical, and the figures when developed take on somewhat the appearance of a parable.

Rather than make a separate group, I place here the few figures dealing with pure abstracts. As a rule the abstract quality is expressed in concrete terms only when it is related to a human being, in which case it really represents a moral state.

In the *Lys dans la vallée* about half of the figures are the development of the conception of life as a journey, with the two details of *abîme* and *désert* standing out prominently: “A m'avancer jusqu'au bord des précipices, à sonder le gouffre du mal, à en interroger le fond, en sentir le froid, et me retrouver tout ému” (p. 530); “Après être descendue dans l'abîme d'où elle put voir encore le ciel” (p. 435); “Je soupçonnai un malheur, comme lorsqu'en marchant sur les voûtes d'une cave les pieds ont en quelque sorte la conscience de la profondeur” (p. 427); “Cet immense malheur déroulant ses sayanes épineuses à chaque difficulté vaincue” (p. 434); “Dans ce grand naufrage, j'apercevais une île où je pouvais aborder” (p. 643); “Voyez par quelles voies nous avons marché l'un vers l'autre; quel aimant nous a dirigés sur l'océan des eaux amères, vers la source d'eau douce, coulant au pied des monts sur un sable pailleté entre deux rives vertes et fleuries” (p. 458); “Cette pensée m'éleva soudain à des hauteurs éthérees. Je me retrouvai dans le ciel de mes anciens songes” (p. 462); “Elle avait habité comme un palais sombre en craignant d'entrer en de somptueux appartements où brillaient des lumières” (p. 525); “Je fouille ce monceau de cendres

et prends plaisir à les étaler devant vous" (p. 647); "Les étendards de la mort qui flottaient sur cette créature" (p. 630).

Similarly for *Un ménage de garçon*: "Flore éprouvait la sensation d'une femme tombée au fond d'un précipice, elle ne voyait que ténèbres dans son avenir, et sur ces ténèbres se dessinaient, comme dans un lointain profond, des choses monstrueuses, indistinctement aperçues et qui l'épouvaient. Elle sentait le froid humide des souterrains" (p. 316); "Il... n'userait pas si promptement son capital d'existence" (p. 158); "Cette enfant qu'il décrassait" (p. 187); "Qu'il jouât, par pitié, la comédie d'une tendresse quelconque" (p. 328); "Répugnances pour le vase amer de la science" (p. 187).

The figures in *Eugénie Grandet* present the same types: "La femme... reste face à face avec le chagrin dont rien ne la distrait, elle descend jusqu'au fond de l'abîme qu'il a ouvert, le mesure, et souvent le comble de ses vœux et de ses larmes" (p. 339); "A quitter ses tristes pensées, à s'élancer avec elle dans les champs de l'espérance et de l'avenir, où elle aimait à s'engager avec lui" (p. 301).

The figures in this class are the result of a very common process of figurative creation; the analogies drawn by Balzac between spiritual and physical experiences are such as have in most cases become stereotyped, and it is more difficult to arrive at real originality by reworking the ideas. With Balzac a pretentious expression of these banal conceptions often produces a ludicrous, mock-heroic impression.

GROUP V. — FIRST TERM : ACTS

This group includes the comparison between two acts, usually purely physical, but always belonging to the same sphere: that is, physical is compared to physical and intellectual to intellectual. The figures are too diversified to be classified, and their creation indicates no great originality. The professions serve most frequently as source for the comparisons, in particular drama, war, finance, and law.

"Criminelles selon la jurisprudence des grandes âmes" (LV., p. 604); "Crimes de lèse-amour" (LV., p. 604); "Mot qui n'était pas encore monnayé" (LV., p. 426); "Cette veuve, dont le deuil fut orné de quelques galanteries" (MG., p. 318); "Ils semblaient se désigner le dessert comme le champ de bataille" (MG., p. 194); "Dans trois jours devait commencer une terrible action, une tragédie bourgeoise sans poison, ni poignard, ni sang répandu ; mais, relativement aux acteurs, plus cruelle que tous les drames accomplis dans l'illustre famille des Atrides" (EG., p. 341); "Endimanchés jusqu'aux dents" (EG., p. 301); "L'assemblée se remua en masse et fit un quart de conversion vers le feu" (EG., p. 251); "En tenant jusqu'au dernier soupir les rênes de ses millions" (EG., p. 360); "Tous les instruments aratoires dont se sert un jeune oisif pour labourer la vie" (EG., p. 248); "La ville entière le mit pour ainsi dire hors la loi, se souvint de ses trahisons, des duretés, et l'excommunia" (EG., p. 353). We find here also the tendency to render the idea more concrete and definite, either by introducing more of the element of physical force or by substituting a specific act for a habit or plan of action.

GROUP VI. — FIRST TERM: Inanimate Objects

Group VI, A. — In the *Lys dans la vallée* there are fifteen comparisons between objects of a very similar nature : natural objects to natural objects and manufactured objects to manufactured : "La rivière fut comme un sentier sur lequel nous volions" (p. 347); "La pluie incessante du pollen, beau nuage qui papillote dans l'air" (p. 480); "Ces résidus de porc sautés dans sa graisse et qui ressemblent à des truffes cuites" (p. 397). Here I have placed also one comparison between animals : (*the horse*) "L'hirondelle du désert" (p. 573). A castle is compared once to a flower (p. 417); the rest of the comparisons are of natural objects to the creations of human

arts — music, poetry, jewelry, cloth, architecture : " Ce poème de fleurs lumineuses qui bourdonnait incessamment ses mélodies au cœur " (p. 481); " Les tremblements de la lune dans les pierreries de la rivière " (p. 444); (*effect of light and shadow*) " Ces jolis jours qui ressemblent à des soieries peintes " (p. 464); " Une longue allée de forêt semblable à quelque nef de cathédrale, où les arbres sont des piliers, où leurs branches forment les arceaux de la voûte, au bout de laquelle une clairière lointaine aux jours mélangés d'ombres ou nuancés par les teintes rouges du couchant point à travers les feuilles et montre comme les vitraux coloriés d'un chœur plein d'oiseaux qui chantent " (p. 478).

In *Un ménage de garçon* the comparisons are between objects of very similar external appearance for the purpose of more accurate description. The effect is usually pejorative : " Un chapeau... découpé comme une feuille de chou sur laquelle auraient vécu plusieurs chenilles... Sa méchante veste ressemblait à un morceau de tapisserie " (p. 184); " Il n'abandonnait son col de satin qu'au moment où il ressemblait à de la bourre " (p. 119); "[Le bouillij disséqué par M. Hochon en tranches semblables à des semelles d'escarpins " (p. 223); " Ruisseaux qui... ressemblent à des rubans d'argent au milieu d'une robe verte " (p. 182). The figures in *Eugénie Grandet* resemble rather those of *Un ménage de garçon*; their effect is frequently comical rather than really descriptive : " Sa vieille montre... qui ressemblait à un vaisseau hollandais " (p. 246); " Les huit marches... étaient disjointes et ensevelies sous de hautes plantes, comme le tombeau d'un chevalier enterré par sa veuve au temps des croisades " (p. 266); " Un bûcher où le bois était rangé avec autant d'exactitude que peuvent l'être les livres d'un bibliophile " (p. 266).

The figures in this group, especially those that have no poetical pretension, are usually well chosen. They give a rather definite picture of the object in question and also suggest the impression that the author wishes us to receive from the

object itself and from the person with whom the object is associated.

Group VI, B. — Under this heading I include all personifications and all animation of inanimate objects.

The *Lys dans la vallée* contains two comparisons of inanimate objects to animals, one personification of a part of the body, two of insects, and five of buildings: "La note unique du rossignol des eaux" (p. 436); "Les moulins... donnaient une voix à cette vallée frémissante" (p. 411). There are fourteen personifications of nature: "Une bruyère fleurie, couverte des diamants de la rosée qui la trempe, et dans laquelle se joue le soleil, immensité parée pour un seul regard qui s'y jette à propos" (p. 478); "Des touffes blanches... vague image des formes souhaitées, roulées comme celles d'une esclave soumise" (p. 480). Seven figures present flowers as representing the thoughts and emotions of man: (*bouquet*) "Ce prolix torrent d'amour" (p. 480); "Des tiges tourmentées comme les désirs entortillés au fond de l'âme" (p. 480). With a great many of these last twenty-one figures, it is hard to decide whether they belong here or in Groups I and III; for instance, the last seven all have to do with the bouquets by which Félix expresses his love to Madame de Mortsau, where in the figures of speech he is simply retranslating the flower language into the original. We are in fact dealing with a secret code rather than with figurative creation. Considering the number of comparisons of women and passions to flowers, the reverse process of the personification is, however, very natural. The two concepts have become almost identical and either may be substituted for the other.'

The personifications in the other two novels are, as a whole, decidedly commonplace. In *Un ménage de garçon* the effect is usually comical. In *Eugénie Grandet* six personify the house and furniture. "Ce terne allait avoir vingt et un ans, il atteignait à sa majorité" (MG., p. 121); "L'insulte faite à l'opposition constitutionnelle et au libéralisme dans la personne du sacro-saint journal" (MG., p. 168); "En 1806, bien des

paroisses en France étaient encore veuves" (MG., p. 189), "La maison Grandet reprit sa physionomie pour tout le monde" (EG., p. 339); "Les murs épais présentaient leur chemise verte" (EG., p. 266); "Un marteau qui...frappait sur la tête grimaçante d'un maître clou" (EG., p. 231); "Le bruit que chaque feuille produisait dans cette cour sonore en se détachant de son rameau donnait une réponse aux secrètes interrogations de la jeune fille" (EG., p. 267). Real personification, then, plays an almost negligible part in Balzac's profuse description of inanimate objects.

CHAPTER III

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF BALZAC'S FIGURES OF SPEECH

Sufficient examples have been given to suggest the main characteristics of the figures of Balzac. In the first place, the comparisons result from intellectually conceived rather than external similarities ; there are comparatively few figures based on form and color, and even fewer where these two properties alone dictate the choice of the comparison. There is a strong ulterior motive in such comparisons as that of a man's face to a skimmer, to fresh butter, or to a wrinkled garment, and in the expressions of external similarities between man and animals. On the whole, the most frequent effect of the figures is to give concrete expression to abstract conceptions ; they indicate an imagination susceptible to physical impressions and with marked tendencies toward the voluptuous.

Metaphors naturally predominate, being a more normal form of expression ; there is, however, a considerable proportion of formal similes, frequently developed along Virgilian lines. A single comparison is often prolonged by a series of similes and metaphors and repeated time after time throughout the book, so that, in spite of the great number of figures, the number of objects from which they are drawn is really not particularly large.

As we have already indicated, there is an intimate relation between the type of figures and the character of the novel ; in other words, Balzac renders the figures of speech an efficient auxiliary in the presentation of his dominating ideas. If we except the poetical figures, we find that, though the rest may shock our aesthetic sense, they give a strikingly vivid impression of the character or object in question. This is especially

true in Group I, A, B, and D, Group V, and Group VI, A, where the figures closely follow conventional lines. But even where the figures seem to convey clearly the idea of Balzac, the impression left by them is not altogether pleasing ; and their analysis from a rhetorical and an esthetic point of view reveals more to blame than to praise.

Probably the most general fault is related to the tendency to exaggeration which finds expression in various elements of Balzac's novels : the characters and bank accounts, his hyperboles and broad generalizations. There is much color-heightening by means of figures. This is not necessarily a defect, for a certain amount of exaggeration can be justified from the artistic standpoint in any phase of literary creation ; as to how much can be used to good effect, it is impossible to fix a standard, for this depends on the reader's bent of mind, and on the degree of assimilation of his own ideas to those of the author. Here we find an intimation as to why the estimates of Balzac's work as a whole, or of single works such as the *Lys dans la vallée*, have varied so widely at different periods and with different individuals.

In *Eugénie Grandet* the most pretentious figures grow out of the effort to magnify the import of this *tragédie bourgeoise*, so commonplace in appearance, which Balzac wills to interpret as surpassing the terrible and thrilling dramas enacted in the family of the Atrides. The intrigues for the hand of Eugénie are likened to the struggles of the Medici and Pazzi at Florence ; Eugénie shows more courage, when she replaces the sugar on the table before the eyes of her father, than the woman who sustains with bleeding hands a silken ladder whereby her lover is escaping. Here the figure is pretentious, for a commonplace act is compared to a grandiose one ; but, as expressed, there is really no exaggeration. *Un ménage de garçon* contains exaggerations of power and importance, as when Flore under the domination of Philippe is likened to France in the hands of Napoleon ; but exaggeration here is usually in the direction of excessive materialism, which will be the subject of a later discussion.

The above-mentioned pretentious figures we can accept with a smile at the conscious or unconscious irony of the author; but in the *Lys dans la vallée* the effort to idealize, which appears only sporadically in *Eugénie Grandet*, produces solid masses, as it were, of pretentious poetical figures, which become insipid from their very number and from their character. Nearly all the comparisons to religious emotions, to saints, martyrs, and the like, come under this head; while the comparisons to flowers, fluids, and flames offend by the manner of expression rather than by the basal idea. A single short paragraph containing six distinct figures will serve to illustrate this point:

“ Je lui contai mon enfance et ma jeunesse, non comme je vous l'ai dite, en la jugeant à distance, mais avec les paroles ardentes du jeune homme de qui les blessures saignaient encore. Ma voix retentit comme la hache des bûcherons dans une forêt. Devant elle tombèrent à grand bruit les années mortes, les longues douleurs qui les avaient hérisées de branches sans feuillage. Je lui peignis avec des mots enfiévrés une foule de détails terribles dont je vous ai fait grâce. J'étais le trésor de mes vœux brillants, l'or vierge de mes désirs, tout un cœur brûlant conservé sous les glaces de ces Alpes entassées par un continual hiver. Lorsque, courbé sous le poids de mes souffrances redites avec les charbons d'Isaïe, j'attendis un mot de cette femme qui m'écoutait la tête baissée, elle éclaira les ténèbres par un regard, elle anima les mondes terrestres et divins par un seul mot ” (LV., p. 451-52).

When the conception is banal, a pretentious elaboration is all the more disagreeable, and the figure becomes pure verbiage worthy of the *précieuses*: “ Vous m'avez naguère dirigé savamment à travers les voies périlleuses du grand monde ” (LV., p. 545); “ Ce trésor englouti dans les eaux dormantes de l'oubli ” (LV., p. 453); “ Ce regard mouillé... comme un éternel joyau dont les feux brillent aux jours difficiles ” (LV., p. 453); “ Nos âmes, qui, pour ainsi dire, entraient l'une chez l'autre sans obstacle, mais sans y être conviées par le baiser ”

(LV., p. 473); "Renversant le pompeux édifice élevé par sa préférence maternelle" (MG., p. 324); "Drapé sur son lit de mort dans le manteau de la philosophie encyclopédiste" (MG., p. 189); "L'amour vrai, l'amour des anges, l'amour fier qui vit de sa douleur et qui en meurt" (EG., p. 382); "Colifichets de dandy...tous les instruments aratoires dont se sert un jeune oisif pour labourer la vie" (EG., 248).

The prime requisite of a figure of speech is that it should be apt, that it should be suitable to the thing compared. If there is no external resemblance between the two objects, or if the two concepts are not associated in our minds so that they can produce similar intellectual or emotional reactions, the figure is unjustifiable. The effort to magnify the import of the subject under discussion naturally leads the author to compare it to something with which it is incompatible; thus many of the inexact, absurd, and meaningless figures are the result of some form of pretension. The comparison of Félix drinking the tears of Madame de Mortsau to a man taking the holy communion would be revolting if the comparison were not so incongruous as to be ridiculous. The comparisons to flowers, fluids, and flames have in general no very distinct meaning, and when we are told that the mournful tones of Madame de Mortsau exhaled an odor like that of cut (decaying?) flowers (LV., p. 573), we are at a loss to relate the two ideas even emotionally. Other examples of questionable clearness and aptness are: "Ma chair laissée en lambeaux dans son cœur" (LV., p. 504); "Un visage où les ailes du plaisir avaient semé leur poussière diaprée" (LV., p. 605); "Son corps ignore la sueur, il aspire le feu dans l'atmosphère et vit dans l'eau sous peine de ne pas vivre" (LV., p. 568). More external is the incongruity in such expressions as: "Une femme...se posa près de moi par un mouvement d'oiseau qui s'abat sur son nid" (LV., p. 408); "Je suis jalouse! dit-elle avec un accent d'exaltation qui ressemblait au coup de tonnerre d'un orage qui passe" (LV., p. 457).

Two examples of improper comparison from *Eugénie Grandet*

are : " [Nanon] plantée sur ses pieds comme un chêne de soixante ans sur ses racines " (EG., 234) ; " Le bonhomme sauta sur le nécessaire comme un tigre fond sur un enfant endormi " (EG., p. 361). The first figure is rendered incongruous by the mention of roots ; as for the second, if a tiger should attack a sleeping child at all, it would not be in the manner that the passage suggests. When Balzac adds *endormi*, he is forgetting for the moment his figure in the desire to emphasize the helplessness of Eugénie.

The impropriety in the figures of Balzac comes largely from the fact that they are too physical, too materialistic for the thing compared. This is especially true of the *Lys dans la vallée*, while in *Un ménage de garçon*, where everything is placed on a materialistic basis, the figures fit in very naturally, though occasionally the limit seems to be overstepped ; " Une femme, verte comme une noyée de deux jours " (MG., p. 333). In the *Lys dans la vallée*, however, the all-pervasive materialism of the figures is displeasing, almost revolting, by contrast with the evident purpose of idealizing. When Félix seeks in the heart of his mother " des endroits friables " where he can attach " quelques rameaux d'affection " (LV., p. 403), when he speaks of a woman as " séchée sur sa tige, faute de sève " (LV., p. 523), or when he compares Madame de Mortsauf to a worm-eaten fruit that is nearing the stage of putrifaction, he is far from the realm of poetic impressions. *Eugénie Grandet* presents a measured use of expressions of materialism in its crudest form. " Un nez... flavescent à l'état normal, mais complètement rouge après les repas, espèce de phénomène végétal " (EG., p. 376), and : " La joie semblait s'échapper comme une fumée par les crevasses de son brun visage " (EG., p. 379) are not exactly pleasing to our sensibilities, but they are in accord with the tone of the passage and with the impression produced by the person described.

The continued expression of the abstract by the concrete produces an impression of materialism. Such comparisons, used with discretion, could be made, however, to produce

extremely poetic effects; the fault with many of Balzac's figures is merely that they insist too much on the similarities, they introduce details that mar the poetic suggestion. This can be exemplified by cases where a single word added spoils the figure. We can form a vague conception of thoughts flooding the soul like waves, but when we are told that they "jailissent écumeuses" (LV., p. 481), our imagination balks. It is acceptable that the soul should bathe in pleasure, but it is hard to conceive of its being "rafraîchie sur toutes ses surfaces, caressée dans ses plis les plus profonds" (LV., p. 473). Similarly, after a long comparison of Madame de Mortsau to a bit of heather near the Villa Diodati, Balzac adds : "Son corps avait la verdure que nous admirons dans les feuilles nouvellement dépliées" (LV., p. 421). "Un teint cuivré, verdi de place en place" (MG., p. 269) offers an interesting example, in which copper complexion suggested the idea of the green corrosion seen so often on copper vessels.

Finally, we have figures which do not accord with themselves. The incoherence is largely attributable to exuberance of imagination. From the multitude of images that arise in his mind, Balzac does not choose ; he adds them one after the other in such quick succession that they frequently overlap. We may define a mixed or incoherent figure as one in which two or more incompatible images are evoked to represent the same object or concept. In order that such a figure may be permissible, it is not sufficient that the figurative expressions should be commonplace ; all but one of them must lose entirely the power of producing an image. Until then a sort of intellectual wrench is necessary in order to grasp the meaning, a process which is especially disagreeable to the French mind, with its love of fitness and exactness. In the following examples, the incoherence is comparatively unobtrusive : "Enivré d'ambition par cette femme, Charles avait caressé, pendant la traversée, toutes ces espérances, qui lui furent présentées par une main habile et sous forme de confidences versées de cœur à cœur" (EG., p. 377); "Une teinte de piété passionnée qui

versa dans l'âme de son enfant chérie la lumière de l'amour céleste" (LV., p. 434); "Nos âmes étaient en proie à ces bouleversemens qui les sillonnent de manière à y laisser d'éternelles empreintes" (LV., p. 466). Each figure, however, presents three or more ideas that do not harmonize, as for instance *en proie*, *bouleversemens*, *sillonnent*, and *empreintes*. The tendency of Balzac seems to be to collect all the sense-impressions suggested by an idea and to fuse them into a single figure. A bouquet appears as poetry, light, and music, with a slight personification and a suggestion of a bee : "Ce poème de fleurs lumineuses qui bourdonnait incessamment ses mélodies au cœur, en y caressant des voluptés cachées" (LV., p. 481). More external is the confusion of an arrow and a shot in : "Jamais cet homme n'avait manqué de lui décocher une flèche au cœur. Oiseau sublime atteint dans son vol par ce grossier grain de plomb, elle tomba" (LV., p. 526). "Tu ne connaissais pas ton oncle, pourquoi pleures-tu ? lui dit son père en lui lançant un de ces regards de tigre affamé qu'il jetait sans doute à ses tas d'or" (EG., p. 276) lacks aptness as well as coherence ; the glance of an angry father, of a hungry tiger, and of a miser before his gold can be hardly be assimilated into a single concept. The most marked tendency in the *Lys dans la vallée* is to fuse the various conceptions noted in Group III, as when Félix speaks of Madame de Mortsauf as "cette fleur sidérale" (LV., p. 437). Other examples are : "Pour aspirer l'air qui sortait de sa lèvre chargé de son âme, pour étreindre cette lumière parlée avec l'ardeur que j'aurais mise à serrer la comtesse sur mon sein" (LV., p. 419); "Je sentis un parfum de femme qui brilla dans mon âme comme y brilla depuis la poésie orientale" (LV., p. 408). Madame de Mortsauf's speech is air surcharged with her soul, it is a light, yet at the same time Félix embraces it as he would the woman herself.

In the light of what has been said, we may analyse certain phases of the intellectual process by which Balzac creates his figures. The continual repetition of practically the same figure

would indicate that, in addition to the figures resulting from a spontaneous operation of the imagination, there are others that grow up out of a preconceived notion of similarity. It is in this last class that the most salient faults occur, resulting from an imperfect analysis of the real relations between the two terms of the comparisons. The human consciousness crowded with concepts is like a sheet of paper on which thousands of overlapping circles of all sizes have been drawn. To make a perfect comparison, one must see in just how far the two concepts coincide, and admit in the expression of the figure of speech nothing that directs the attention away from the common territory; an artistic figure is one in which the reader does not feel that the author has overstepped the limits.

Balzac, who frequently unites concepts that really are related by very unessential traits and that have little common territory, oversteps the limit in both directions. We have already noted, in speaking of figures that are not apt, that he forces a figure in order to make it better suit the idea which he wishes to present¹. Similarly he tends to add to the figure something that may refer directly to the first term but is out of place as applied to the second. Thus in the tiger-boa comparison of Grandet, the last word *méthodique* refers to Grandet rather than to the serpent. In : "Elle tremblait de laisser cette brebis [Eugénie], blanche comme elle, seule au milieu d'un monde égoïste qui voulait lui arracher sa toison, ses trésors" (EG., p. 364), *trésors* refers to Eugénie and not to the ewe. From such expressions, which arise from the desire to express everything, it is but a step to mixed metaphor; if his mind reverts too strongly to the literal sense, the author may re-express it by an entirely different figure. But it is usually in the other direction that the mind of Balzac is directed. He loses sight of his original idea and develops the figure for its own sake, as for example in : "Son désir va comme le tourbillon du désert, le désert dont l'ardente immensité se peint dans ses

1. See *supra*, p. 32.

yeux, le désert plein d'azur et d'amour, avec son ciel inaltérable, avec ses fraîches nuits étoilées" (LV., p. 568); "Henriette était l'oiseau chantant ses poèmes orientaux dans son bocage au bord du Gange, et, comme une pierre vivante, volant de branche en branche parmi les roses d'un immense volcaméria toujours fleuri" (LV., p. 556). More especially in the cases we have noted of over-emphasis of the materialism, it seems that the image has entirely replaced the original idea in the mind of Balzac. Indeed he often fuses in such a way the figurative and the literal that we are inclined to believe that he loses the ability to distinguish between the two, that he uses the figures without being conscious that he is departing from the normal speech.

The figures indicate also the lack of such critical sense as would naturally belong to a man working more soberly, without such feverish enthusiasm or inspiration of creation: a critical spirit that would restrain his natural tendencies, correct the patent faults, soften the brutality of the materialism, and restrict the number of the figures.

CHAPTER IV

CAUSES OF BALZAC'S FREQUENT USE OF FIGURES

As one may judge from the above, Balzac is exceedingly fond of figures of speech and uses them much more than the average prose writer. His novels at times teem with them : a single comparison is carried out into many ramifications, or one follows another in quick succession, as on page 419 of the *Lys dans la vallée*, where there are fifteen distinct figures. Moreover, a large proportion of the figures shock our sense of propriety in one way or another. On the whole, in quantity and quality they present a somewhat undigested and indigestible mass. Indeed the severe and almost universal criticism of Balzac's style — aside from composition in the broader sense — is largely equivalent to a criticism of his figures of speech, for it is in them that the vulgarity, bad taste, bombast, *galimatias*, and pretentiousness most often find expression. When Sainte-Beuve, Taine, or Faguet wish to illustrate certain bad qualities of Balzac's style, it is his figures of speech that they quote ; and if you remove the figures of speech from a page of his novels, you have as a rule a passage of simple, straightforward prose that does not in any way merit the following not altogether unjustifiable tirade of Pontmartin : “ Quel encombrement ! que de phrases estropiées ! que de pages hydropiques ! que d'obscurités ! que d'afféteries ! que d'emphase ! que de néologismes inacceptables ! que de métaphores incohérentes ! que d'analogies impossibles ! Sous cette richesse apparente que d'embarras et de gêne ! Quelle fatigue pour arriver à faire moins bien en voulant mieux faire, à tout embrouiller en voulant tout dire ! ! ” The problem that faces us in a study of the figures of Balzac may be formulated in

1. *Gauseries littéraires*, p. 302.

the following way. Here is a man who in many respects is a master of language and who is constantly trying to find the best expression for his ideas. From his correspondence and from the testimony of his friends we have abundant evidence that he literally tortured himself in his efforts to perfect his style. Then why does he drag in this apparently extraneous mass of figures which seems so often to hinder rather than to aid his expression? Or, to resolve the problem into its three main divisions : Why does Balzac use so many figures? What explanation can we find for the kind of figures that he uses? What impression is made by these figures upon the reader? In the present chapter we are concerned primarily with the first of these questions.

Let us first consider what offers itself as the simplest explanation. The figure of speech is a literary artifice and is frequently used as a stylistic ornament. It is only natural that Balzac in his efforts to attain to an artistic style should seize upon a process which had been effectively used by others and which appeared easy to imitate, since it might be considered to entail only an external grafting. This explanation will account in large measure for the unusually frequent use of figures in the *Lys dans la vallée*. The greater contemporaries of Balzac were consummate stylists ; Gautier, G. Sand, Hugo, Lamennais, Mérimée, Chateaubriand, and others were endowed with artistic or poetic natures, and each had built up for himself out of the ruins of classicism a style suitable to his genius : styles which had many admirers in the days when the romantic emphasis on form was at its height, and which today might serve as models for certain genres. Though Balzac would not have accorded stylistic superiority to all of these, the continual harping of the critics on his lack of style worried him, and he determined to show them what he could do when he tried. The *Lys dans la vallée* is an attempt to rewrite *Volupté* and to surpass Sainte-Beuve in his own field of the psychological novel ; it was to be a sublime idyl of pure love. He refers several times in his correspondence to the difficulty

that he has in composing it. "J'ai voulu me servir du langage de Massillon et cet instrument-là est lourd à manier¹." In his effort to write ornately, to make the style match the sublimity of the subject, he has added figure after figure, until he resembles the painter in the *Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* who, in his constant desire to add just one more element of beauty to his canvas, makes of it an unintelligible daub for all others but himself.

But we cannot accept the desire for stylistic adornment as the only or even the chief reason for the frequent use of figurative language: what we find in the *Lys dans la vallée* is simply an exaggeration of a natural stylistic tendency of Balzac. He was already much addicted to the figure of speech, as we see from *Eugénie Grandet*, and we may judge that its use corresponded to some conscious or unconscious need of the author. This brings us to the question of the fundamental purpose of figures. It is true that they may be purely stylistic ornaments, yet even as such they should produce in the reader an impression, an emotional reaction, desired by the author. They serve also to present an idea in a clearer and more forceful manner. In the comparison of an unfamiliar or indescribable object to something well known to the reader, they facilitate expression by the substitution of familiar concepts for a long abstract or technical discussion. The figure is, as it were, a pattern laid down by which the reader is to cut the still shapeless cloth of his thought. The expression would lose effectiveness if we should try to give an accurate description: the figure is more forceful because it is shorter, because it requires an effort of the imagination to grasp the real meaning, which is not directly expressed. The mind is forced to form a definite concrete image, and receives a more vivid and lasting impression. Literal speech might be compared to an electric current passing through a series of wires in contact, and the figure of speech to the spark when the two wires are separated: a metaphor such as "the wings of night"

1. *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 277; cf. p. 278.

is really an incorrect expression, causing a break in the continuity of the thought. The greater the distance between the two wires, the brighter the spark will be, up to the point where the current will not make the leap; the stronger the current, the greater the possible leap. Thus the objects compared may become absolutely incompatible, and you have a figure which is virtually meaningless, but an impassioned style such as that of Balzac vitalizes many figures that would fall flat in a cold, classical style with, consequently, a colder, more critical reader. We may suppose then that Balzac sought by the use of the figures to attain to a more adequate and more forceful expression of his ideas. In order to get a better comprehension of this statement, let us consider the problems which would face a Balzac writing in France in the early nineteenth century.

The enforced formation of images is one of the most important elements in vivid writing. Our ordinary modes of expression have become so stereotyped that the words are purely abstract symbols and present no picture to the mind: they may even be used and heard without a full realization of their meaning, because they simply revive the same emotional reaction that was produced when they were heard before. It is true that language is largely a network of originally figurative expressions, — *ivre de joie*, *chef* in its various meanings, or *penser*, etymologically the same as *peser*, — but by constant use figures lose all image-arousing power and become purely abstract. The tendency in language, when such expressions become banal, is to introduce a new expression, as *peser* in a similar meaning to that of *penser*; for the mind must crystalize an abstract conception around concrete phenomena in order to use it. With the French, a supremely intellectual people who deal readily with abstract concepts, this tendency is not so evident. In the development of their language up to the nineteenth century (barring the increase and the more extended use of scientific terms in the second half of the eighteenth), they have striven to limit rather than to extend their vocabulary; they have tended to restrict themselves to a single

word for any one generalized concept and to leave the particular concept to be supplied by the context (cf. the verbs of motion : *aller*, *venir*, *se promener*, *reculer*, or a noun such as *terre*). Each word gathers meaning from the surrounding words, and the word group conveys an idea which the mind grasps with little effort. The French also tended to restrict the number of figurative uses of a given word. There results an admirable clearness, as the essential significance is not obscured by extraneous or non-essential elements. But such expression is suited especially to the transmission of abstract and conventional ideas¹.

If we study the masters of French literature, we find that, in a majority of cases, they depart little from this standard French mode of expression. We find also that their preëminence is due to artistic imitation of the classics, to delicate psychological analysis, to the expression of the latent passions and aspirations of man, to their charming imagination and fancy, or to their treatment of the problems of philosophy, morality, and society, all presented in a form and style that approaches perfection for the particular genre. But their creations do not give a powerful illusion of life, we do not

1. In English the situation is slightly different, for we have a larger vocabulary and have retained more words relating to the same general concept, some of which, especially those of Anglo-Saxon origin, have kept a strong literal significance (cf. *edge* and *border*). In this way certain figurative expressions which are natural and current retain more of their power of evocation, because they are not so constantly used. By the side of them exist other modes of expression, absolutely literal in the impression they give, which are used unless the writer seeks consciously or otherwise the more vivid form. This abundance may lead to obscurity at times, but as a result of it vividness of expression becomes a more natural characteristic of the language. Also the readiness with which English substitutes substantives for adjectives or adverbs enables us to evoke an image without going out of our way to do so : "star-memories," "violet-breath," "butter-fingered" (note in this connection the recommendations of the *Pléiade* and such attempted innovations as the famous *pître promontoire* of Victor Hugo). In French, imagery is farther from the line of normal speech and has to be created more consciously and externally. We may find here an explanation of the slowness of response of the average English mind to most French poetry : the images are, when measured by English standards, few in number and lacking in spontaneity.

turn a street-corner expecting to meet one of their characters face to face. Rabelais, Molière and Saint-Simon, however, belong to a smaller group who are preëminently creators. They present not abstractions but real human beings that become personal acquaintances of the reader, social orders that seem as palpable to him as the one in which he lives. There is an intangible something which we can only define by that undefinable term, genius, by which these men impose the creatures of their imagination ¹ upon our consciousness in spite of an improbability or even impossibility of their ever having existed. There is something in these authors that appeals to us as do the crude elemental forces of nature ; this is reflected in their styles, which do not respect the more conventional ideas of composition. Careless of restraint, they seek a mode of expression conformable to their subjects ; one that leaves them unhampered in personal expression ; for in the last analysis the pulse of life must be transmitted from the author's own personality. It is interesting to note that the characters of Molière, who almost necessarily made greater concessions to convention, tend more than those of Rabelais and Saint-Simon to become types or abstractions.

My purpose is not to claim that Rabelais, Molière and Saint-Simon outrank the other great writers, but to bring out by the contrast I have made that the author who produces an illusion of life must have greater freedom in the choice of his modes of expression ; he must speak a language which itself has life and partakes of the nature of the creator and of the thing created.

Rabelais gave his imagination carte blanche among all the verbal riches of the renaissance, and reveled in metaphors and similes : no author ever had freer range for his genius. And when we read Rabelais, we read him without stylistic prejudice, for there had been set up no conventional standard for his time. The content and the style impress themselves upon us as so intimately related, so perfectly in harmony, that we

1. For Saint-Simon, see *infra*, p. 44.

cannot conceive of his having written in any other manner, and we are ready to class this hilarious, obscene, bewilderingly exuberant raconteur as a literary artist¹. Molière in a soberer age made free use of vivid, picturesque colloquial words and modes of expression. Modern criticism has weighed the objections offered to this, and has ruled that an author has the right to make his characters speak the language natural to them. Saint-Simon, inasmuch as he copied more closely from nature, may not be called a creator in the same measure as the other two; his imagination does not play so large a part, but his style re-creates, if it does not create. His men and women are creatures of flesh and blood and not the puppets of historical accounts: the illusion of life on the page of a book is equally difficult to procure whether the model really existed or not, for in either case the immediate source is the conception in the mind of the author. Indeed the representation of actualities presents a peculiar danger, in that the mind is frequently not able to distinguish the non-essential among the many elements that crowd in upon the consciousness. Saint-Simon's style caused considerable disturbance when the *Mémoires* first appeared, and it resembles in many ways that of Balzac, with bold figures of speech and a disregard for grammatical and aesthetic niceties².

1. Cf. Pierre de la Juillière, *Les images dans Rabelais*, ZRPh., Beiheft XXXVII. The general types of figures in Rabelais correspond to the more materialistic ones of Balzac. Rabelais shows, for instance, 363 comparisons to animals.

2. Such lines as these of Taine would seem to have been written on Balzac himself: "Cette passion ôte au style toute pudeur. Modération, bon goût littéraire, éloquence, noblesse, tout est emporté et noyé... La cuisine, l'écurie, le garde-manger, la maçonnerie, la ménagerie, les mauvais lieux, il prend des expressions partout. Il est cru, trivial et pétri ses figures en pleine boue... c'est à ce prix qu'est le génie; uniquement et totalement englouti dans l'idée qui l'absorbe, il perd de vue la mesure, la décence et le respect. Il y gagne la force; car il prend le droit d'aller jusqu'au bout de sa sensation, d'égaler les mouvements de son style aux mouvements de son cœur... ce style bizarre, excessif, incohérent, surchargé, est celui de la nature elle-même; nul n'est plus utile pour l'histoire de l'âme; il est la notation littérale et spontanée des sensations." *Essay on Saint-Simon in Essais de critique et d'histoire*, pp. 244-251.

Coming now to Balzac we find an interesting page of Gautier : " La langue française, épurée par les classiques du dix-septième siècle, n'est propre lorsqu'on veut s'y conformer qu'à rendre des idées générales, et qu'à peindre des figures conventionnelles dans un milieu vague. Pour exprimer cette multiplicité de détails, de caractères, de types, d'architectures, d'ameublements, Balzac fut obligé de se forger une langue spéciale, composée de toutes les technologies, de tous les argots de la science, de l'atelier, des coulisses, de l'amphithéâtre même. Chaque mot qui disait quelque chose était le bienvenu, et la phrase, pour le recevoir, ouvrait une incise, une parenthèse, et s'allongeait complaisamment. — C'est ce qui a fait dire aux critiques superficiels que Balzac ne savait pas écrire. — Il avait, bien qu'il ne le crût pas, un style et un très beau style, — le style nécessaire, fatal et mathématique de son idée¹. " It is not true, however, that Balzac continued to think that he did not have a good style, for he does not hesitate to affirm that only he, Gautier, and Hugo knew the French language².

In the above quotation Gautier speaks especially of technical terms which had already been carried over into literature in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and Balzac does make free use of them. But they serve rather to give accurate, scientific descriptions of material objects, of the milieu in which his characters moved ; they are an aid, but used alone they belong to the domain of scientific discussion rather than to literature. Balzac needed something more ; he felt instinctively that his ideas and impressions could not be adequately reproduced in others by means of conventional French prose, and he could not take refuge in poetry as did so many of his contemporaries for their most passionate expressions, for neither his genius nor his subject matter was poetic. He affirms in many places the author's right to coin new words

1. Gautier, *Portraits contemporains*, p. 410.

2. It is well to note, however, the distinction which Balzac makes when he says of G. Sand : " Sans savoir la langue française elle a *le style*. " *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, I, p. 464.

and expressions to suit his ideas. In speaking of certain Old-French words, he says to his sister : " Quels jolis mots ! expriment-ils bien ce qu'ils veulent dire ! . . . Qui a donc le droit de faire l'aumône à une langue, si ce n'est pas l'écrivain ? ! "

In the *Contes drolatiques*, where he wished merely to tell a story, he had the happy idea of going back and borrowing the rich, picturesque, and unfettered language of the sixteenth century, which he handled with masterly art and charming effectiveness. Even here he probably did not attempt an accurate reproduction of the language of Rabelais ; he sought freedom and not a change of masters. Language was an instrument that had to be fashioned to his purpose.

But such a medium was not suitable for modern subjects and the various philosophical and social problems that they involve. Balzac's ideas on modern style are indicated in his criticism of Stendhal, for whom he expresses unbounded admiration in so far as the content of his works was concerned, but " il n'a pas assez soigné la forme : il écrivait comme les oiseaux chantent, et notre langue est une sorte de Madame Honesta qui ne trouve rien de bien que ce qui est irréprochable, ciselé, léché². " The form of this criticism seems strange as coming from Balzac, but he does not see how Stendhal could expect to express himself in the simple, correct, colorless, figureless style of the eighteenth century³.

1. *Oeuvres*, Vol. XXIV, pp. LVII-LVIII.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 491-92.

3. Balzac was by no means alone in his desire to infuse new blood into the French language. The matter had been discussed in the journals and parliamentary debates. Chateaubriand, Mme de Staël, Victor Hugo and others had hazarded innovations in vocabulary, syntax, and figurative creations. Stendhal, on the contrary, is an out-and-out reactionary in matter of language. He says in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823, p. 113) : " Il ne faut pas innover dans la langue parce que la langue est une chose de convention. Laissions cette gloire [d'inventer des tours nouveaux] à Mme de Staël, à MM. de Chateaubriand, de Marechancy, etc... Il est sûr qu'il est plus vite fait d'inventer un tour que de le chercher péniblement au fond d'une *Lettre provinciale* ou d'une harangue de Patru. Une langue est composée de ses tours non moins que de ses mots. Toutes les fois qu'une idée a déjà un tour qui l'exprime clairement, pourquoi en produire un nouveau ? Cf. Brunot in : *Petit de Jullerville, Histoire de la langue et de la littérature françaises*, Vol. VIII, p. 714.

There is a most interesting paragraph in *Louis Lambert* which, though obscure in places, throws light on Balzac's attitude towards words as expressions of ideas. Louis Lambert is speaking of the fascinating study of the origin and development of words :

“ L'assemblage des lettres, leurs formes, la figure qu'elles donnent à un mot, dessinent exactement, suivant le caractère de chaque peuple, des êtres inconnus dont le souvenir est en nous. Qui nous expliquera philosophiquement la transition de la sensation à la pensée, de la pensée au verbe, du verbe à son expression hiéroglyphique, des hiéroglyphes à l'alphabet, de l'alphabet à l'éloquence écrite, dont la beauté réside dans une suite d'images classées par les rhéteurs, et qui sont comme les hiéroglyphes de la pensée ? L'antique peinture des idées humaines configurées par les formes zoologiques n'aurait-elle pas déterminé les premiers signes dont s'est servi l'Orient pour écrire ses langages ? Puis n'aurait-elle pas traditionnellement laissé quelques vestiges dans nos langues modernes, qui toutes se sont partagé les débris du verbe primitif des nations, verbe majestueux et solennel, dont la majesté, dont la solennité décroissent à mesure que vieillissent les sociétés ; dont les retentissements si sonores dans la Bible hébraïque, si beaux encore dans la Grèce, s'affaiblissent à travers les progrès de nos civilisations successives ? Est-ce à cet ancien esprit que nous devons les mystères enfouis dans toute parole humaine ? N'existe-t-il pas dans le mot **VRAI** une sorte de rectitude fantastique ? Ne se trouve-t-il pas dans le son bref qu'il exige une vague image de la chaste nudité, de la simplicité du vrai en toute chose ? Cette syllabe respire je ne sais quelle fraîcheur. J'ai pris pour exemple la formule d'une idée abstraite, ne voulant pas expliquer le problème par un mot qui le rendit trop facile à comprendre, comme celui du **VOY**, où tout parle aux sens. N'en est-il pas ainsi de chaque verbe ? Tous sont empreints d'un vivant pouvoir qu'ils tiennent de l'âme, et qu'ils lui restituent par les mystères d'une action et d'une réaction merveilleuses entre la parole et la pensée. Ne dirait-on pas d'un

amant qui puise sur les lèvres de sa maîtresse autant d'amour qu'il lui en communique ? Par leur seule physionomie, les mots raniment dans notre cerveau les créatures auxquelles ils servent de vêtement " (pp. 3-4).

About the same idea is expressed by Taine when he defends the style of Balzac : " Vos mots sont des notations, ayant chacun sa valeur exacte, fixée par la racine et ses alliances ; les siens sont des symboles dont la rêverie capricieuse invente le sens et l'emploi. Il a été sept ans, dit-il, à comprendre ce qu'est la langue française. La vérité est qu'il l'a étudiée profondément, mais à sa façon, comme d'autres qu'on accuse aussi d'être barbares. Pour eux, chaque mot est, non un chiffre, mais un éveil d'images : ils le pèsent, le retournent, le scandent ; pendant ce temps un nuage d'émotions et de figures fugitives traverse leur cerveau... le mot est pour eux l'appel soudain de ce monde vague d'apparitions évanouies ! "

The central idea of the paragraph in *Louis Lambert* is that every word presents to the mind an image of the thing that it represents, an idea which is elaborated in a way that illustrates two striking characteristics of Balzac's unscientifically scientific mind. Intolerant of half-way affirmations, he tends to carry any principle to its ultimate conclusion ; not only do concrete terms produce concrete images, but an abstract adjective such as *true* ; and we know that he even holds that the names of people are an index to their character. Secondly, in his mania for logical explanation of all phenomena, he imagines that the power of evocation resides in the actual form of the word and of the letters composing it, and that the form and arrangement of the alphabetic symbols must preserve traces of the primitive status when writing had the form of pictures more or less directly suggesting the idea to be represented. A typical Balzac theory, an ingenious mixing of fact and fancy, but it evidences Balzac's feeling of the need for vivid expression. He claims that the literal expression has the power to evoke the image, but a few lines above he has said

1. *Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire*, pp. 42 ff.

that the impression made by a word becomes more and more indistinct as you advance from the most ancient language towards the modern, and also that rhetorical images are the hieroglyphics of thought. He feels this so much that in this very paragraph he uses numerous figures in order to express his idea.

From what we have said of the nature of figures of speech, it is evident that they do offer at least a partial solution of the problem of stylistic revivification. The possibilities of figurative creation are infinite in number and variety. We have already seen that Balzac uses comparisons in order to convey more adequately, more strikingly, more palpably the desired impression. Note, for example, the vivid picture of the wretched abandoned Rabouilleuse as given by the succession of figures. It all but awakens the physiological reaction of disgust that you would feel in beholding such a scene in real life : “*Une femme, verte comme une noyée de deux jours, et maigre comme l'est une étique deux heures avant sa mort. Ce cadavre infect avait une méchante rouennerie à carreaux sur sa tête dépouillée de cheveux. Le tour des yeux caves était rouge et les paupières étaient comme des pellicules d'œuf*” (MG., p. 333). Also the figures furnish an escape valve for Balzac's plethora of ideas and his exuberance of imagination : “*Les conversations entre camarades étaient dominées par le monde oriental et sultanesque du Palais-Royal. Le Palais-Royal était un Eldorado d'amour où, le soir, les lingots couraient tout monnayés. Là cessaient les doutes les plus vierges, là pouvaient s'apaiser nos curiosités allumées ! Le Palais-Royal et moi, nous fûmes deux asymptotes dirigées l'une vers l'autre sans pouvoir se rencontrer*” (LV., p. 402). Or : “*Voyez par quelles voies nous avons marché l'un vers l'autre ; quel aimant nous a dirigés sur l'océan des eaux amères, vers la sourcee d'eau douce, coulant au pied des monts sur un sable pailleté, entre deux rives vertes et fleuries. N'avons-nous pas, comme les mages, suivi la même étoile ? Nous voici devant la crèche d'où s'éveille un divin enfant qui lancera ses flèches au front des arbres nus, qui nous ranimera le monde par ses cris joyeux, qui par des*

plaisirs incessants donnera du goût à la vie, rendra aux nuits leur sommeil, aux jours leur allégresse. Qui donc a serré chaque année de nouveaux noeuds entre nous ? Ne sommes-nous pas plus que frère et sœur ? Ne déliez jamais ce que le ciel a réuni. Les souffrances dont vous parlez étaient le grain répandu à flots par la main du semeur pour faire éclorer la moisson déjà dorée par le plus beau des soleils. Voyez ! voyez ! N'irons-nous pas ensemble tout cueillir brin à brin ? " (LV., p. 458). The impression given by such passages may be painful at times, but they represent a superabundant vitality, the overflow of a highly developed sensibility, and should be judged in their setting as regards the work and the author¹.

Balzac then was drawn instinctively to the figure of speech because it seemed to furnish a more adequate expression for certain phases of his genius ; and, though he may have made many mistakes, we cannot say that he failed in his purpose. I shall later on discuss this point, as to the effect of the style on the reader, giving here only a quotation from Sainte-Beuve, who certainly cannot be accused of favorable prejudice. His praise is given grudgingly and with restrictions : " Il est un peu comme ces généraux qui n'emportent la moindre position qu'en prodiguant le sang des troupes (c'est l'encre seulement qu'il prodigue) et qu'en perdant énormément de monde. Mais, bien que l'économie des moyens doive compter, l'essentiel après tout, c'est d'arriver à un résultat, et M. de Balzac en mainte occasion est et demeure victorieux. — Il commence si bien chaque récit, il nous circonvient si vivement, qu'il n'y a pas moyen de résister et de dire *non* à ses promesses ; il nous prend les mains, il nous introduit de gré ou de force dans chaque aventure. — On froisse la page sous sa main, mais on y revient ; on est ému enfin, entraîné, on se penche malgré soi

1. Compare Saint-Preux excusing himself for figures used in a former letter : " Pour peu qu'on ait de chaleur dans l'esprit, on a besoin de métaphores et d'expressions figurées pour se faire entendre... il n'y a qu'un géomètre et un sot qui puissent parler sans figures... Mes propres phrases me font rire, je l'avoue, et je les trouve absurdes, grâce au soin que vous avez pris à les isoler ; mais laissez-les où je les ai mises, vous les trouverez claires, et même énergiques " (*La nouvelle Héloïse*, II, p. 16).



vers ce gouffre inassouvi¹. " What higher praise can an author receive than that he has gained his ends, that he has held your interest, imposed his ideas upon you, and made you accept his creations in spite of yourself. Such praise concerns the style as well as the content, whatever the intention of the critic, for such an impression could not be produced if the style were not in harmony with the content. That is all we can rightly ask of any style. Brunetière says: " Trop souvent il n'a réussi à exprimer sa pensée qu'au moyen d'une multitude de métaphores qui approchent du galimatias² " ; but these very metaphors give an impression of vigor, or material life, they relieve the monotony and chill of enumeration of detail and abstract analysis, they keep our mind alert by the necessity of forming and relating concrete images, by the continual occurrence of the unexpected which we must fit into the trend of thought. Balzac's world, his philosophy, even his spiritualism and metaphysics are all materialistic and could not possibly be expressed in purely abstract terms ; his style is an organic and necessary part of his work, and should not be criticized without taking this fact into account. But, before we can pass final judgment on the merits and demerits of Balzac's figures, we must attempt to explain their character by their relation to Balzac and his subject matter.

1. *Portraits contemporains*, II, pp. 342, note, 343, and 351.

2. *Honoré de Balzac*, p. 294.

CHAPTER V

RELATION OF BALZAC'S FIGURES TO HIS PSYCHOLOGY

The figures of Balzac, then, are the result of an effort, conscious or otherwise, to render his expression more vivid and vigorous, to reproduce more exactly his own sensations in the mind of the reader. We have seen that very often his figures do not produce the impression that he evidently intended they should, that they conceal or becloud his thought instead of expressing it, that they are revolting to our sensibilities. This chapter and the next will be an attempt to explain this situation by isolating certain of the influences which have combined to produce the figures such as we find them. We have already, in Chapter II, treated the question in so far as it concerns the psychological process that results immediately in the production of a figure; what we now have to say is supplementary to the features already noted, and at the same time it serves to explain them, inasmuch as we are getting deeper into the psychological nature of the author. It is an elusive subject and as complex as human nature itself; we cannot hope to be exhaustive, nor can we affirm anything save certain well-defined tendencies, which, while incapable of mathematical proof, present plausible solutions for the literary phenomena which we are discussing. The problem is somewhat simplified by the fact that what we have to explain are faults and excesses rather than excellence. It is easier to explain the fall of an eagle than its flight.

In the first place we must remember that Balzac's attitude towards life is in general anything but idealistic; and the fact that a figure is displeasing to us frequently means, not that the figure is improper from the standpoint of the author, but that we are not willing to accept the conception of life which produced the figure. Balzac's figures are flesh of his flesh, and

they lack certain qualities of delicacy just as he does ; frequently this fact is sufficient explanation for the choice of a comparison.

I

INFLUENCE OF THE CHARACTERS ON BALZAC AND ON EACH OTHER

Many figures that seem improper may be explained by the manner in which Balzac conceived and executed his novels. Anecdotes, testimony of friends, and his work itself show to what extent he was obsessed by his characters. He talked of them to his friends as of real men and women, discussing their personalities and their prospects. He would shut himself up for long seasons, sustaining himself almost entirely with coffee, at home for no one but Grandet, Bridau, or Rastignac, living the life of each individual, thinking his thoughts, experiencing his joys and sorrows. The force, verity, and illusion of life in his creations result largely from this ability to subordinate his own personality, to lose himself in his characters. But as a result of this process, we find many expressions coming from the pen of Balzac that would be natural only in the mouth of one of his personages. The figures in *Un ménage de garçon* are usually such as we should expect of the leading character, Philippe Bridau. *La Muse du département* is composed in a style full of conceits and vulgar pretension such as constantly arise in the conversations of Dinah Piédefer and of the journalist Lousteau. From these two Balzac seems to borrow such expressions as : " Sa robe de chambre... ce produit incessueux d'un ancien pardessus chiné de Madame Piédefer et d'une robe de feu Madame de la Baudraye " (p. 386) ; " Horticulture des vulgarités " (p. 402) ; " Sa femme exécutait une sonate de paroles et des duos de dialectique " (p. 395) ; " Ces exorbitantes dépenses d'esprit et d'attention " (p. 397) ; " Son feuilleton dans un journal quotidien qui ressemblait au rocher de Sisyphe et qui tombait tous les lundis sur la barbe de sa

plume" (p. 484). *L'Illustre Gaudissart* is especially striking in this respect, as there is only one character of importance. If we compare the figures of Gaudissart with those of Balzac in this *conte* we find it hard to differentiate them. The same is true for the style as a whole; we might imagine that we are reading the memoirs of Gaudissart.

There are possible advantages in this stylistic contagion. The description of a Homais in the prose of a Flaubert is not altogether above criticism, for a dual impression is produced on the reader by the character and by the style, and we see the character only through the style, that is, through the eyes of the author who stands aloof. In any of the above-mentioned novels of Balzac the impression on the reader is single and more vivid, for the style and the character are the same: the style simply furnishes a harmonious stage-setting for the actors. On the other hand, an author who composes in this manner loses the use of his critical faculties, he loses the perspective that is necessary in order to restrain and correct his imagination. Also, in a work where there are several distinct characters, one character or one type is likely to dominate the book and the style. Such is the case with *Un ménage de garçon*, even to the point of affecting the very speech of the other characters. The brutal expressions of Joseph, the artist, are especially striking, and his figures in every case but one are based on crude puns or a cynical materialism. In the *Lys dans la vallée*, priests, maids, Natalie, and Lady Dudley all speak the language of Félix and Madame de Mortsau, and only the carefully constructed character of M. de Mortsau stands out in strong contrast. There seems to be a certain inflexibility in the mind of Balzac which rendered difficult for him the quick changes of tone and point of view in his novels, and which must have been a constant hindrance to him in his dramatic efforts. One of the merits of *Eugénie Grandet* is that here he seems to have overcome this difficulty. Three characters, Grandet, Eugénie, and Nanon stand out with especial distinctness, and by their mutual reaction they seem to hold the author in restraint.

It is worth while to note here the use of figures by the characters in this novel. There are some forty in the speeches of Grandet; a large number of them are banal, even to the point of being colloquialisms, but they express excellently the attitude of mind of the man, his matter-of-fact brutality and obsession by the idea of money: "Il faut laisser passer la première averse" [*tears of Charles for his father*] (p. 286); "Est-ce que nous ne vivons pas de morts [as do the crows]?" Qu'est-ce donc que les successions?" (p. 272); "Tous ces gens-là me servent de harpons pour pêcher" (p. 244); "Je serai dépouillé, trahi, tué, dévoré par ma fille" (p. 339); "Les écus vivent et grouillent comme des hommes, ça va, ça vient, ça sue, ça produit" (p. 346); "Quand elle aurait doré son cousin de la tête aux pieds" (p. 350). The money element is present in a majority of his figures, but the most interesting are the cases where he expresses other ideas in terms of finance: "Je ne veux pas qu'il t'arrive malheur à l'échéance de ton âge" (p. 342); or the more banal: "Il est sept heures et demie, vous devriez aller vous serrer dans votre portefeuille" (p. 302).

Eugénie uses four figures; they are banally poetical in their sentimentality and in one case rather ludicrous: "Le malheur veille pendant qu'il dort" (p. 278); "Je m'embarquerai sur la foi de votre parole pour traverser les dangers de la vie à l'abri de votre nom" (p. 387). The nine figures used by Nanon are an admirable expression of the plain-spoken, devout peasant: "Il est étendu comme un veau sur son lit et pleure comme une Madeleine" (p. 288); "L'enfant dort comme un chérubin... comme s'il était le roi de la terre... comme un sabot" (pp. 275-76); "Il y en a qui, pus y deviennent vieux, pus y durcissent; mais lui [Grandet], il se fait doux comme votre cassis, et y rabonniit" (p. 343).

The other figures are in harmony with their users. Deserving of special comment are the eleven metaphors in the letter of Grandet's brother, which, though very materialistic, become poetic in their sombre, impassioned vigor: "J'aurais voulu

sentir de saintes promesses dans la chaleur de ta main, qui m'eût réchauffé" (p. 257); "Il ignorait, par bonheur, que les derniers flots de ma vie s'épanchaient dans cet adieu" (p. 256); "Je voudrais avoir le bras assez fort pour l'envoyer d'un seul coup dans les cieux, près de sa mère" (p. 256). These expressions seem very natural when we consider the situation of the writer.

II

FIGURES RESULTING FROM THE SUBSTITUTION OF IMAGINATION FOR OBSERVATION

If we examine the table given above with a view to determining what purposes guided Balzac in the use of speech, we are struck at once with the fact that nearly all his figures have to do with mankind. It is true that one of the innovations of Balzac in the novels was the importance that he gave to the material surroundings of his characters; and the description of physical objects takes up a considerable part of these three novels, though he does not go to extremes as in some of the others. But in dealing with physical objects, he does not feel the need of figurative expression, for the literal term brings up a concrete image; and Balzac, who had an admirable vision for the external aspects of things and a vocabulary overflowing with all the technicalities to express what he sees, feels that he can give a more accurate impression of the object in question by a detailed description than by comparing it with other objects or by imbuing it with life by personification.

It is in dealing with the more intangible phases of life that he feels the need of figurative language, of an expression that substitutes a concrete image for an abstract concept or for spiritual phenomena. In other words he is not a psychologist, he has not the power to paint in abstract terms the internal working of a complex soul. His greatest creations are those in which the character expresses itself almost entirely in actions; these

external manifestations he chooses with an admirable instinct, so that the character seems alive and real for us; but the psychology remains simple, composed largely of the generalization of elemental principles. These characters, moreover, are materialistic: Balzac moves at ease in the money-paved courts of Grandet's brain. The difficulty comes when it is a question of a delicate and idealized character. He says himself in the *Lys dans la vallée*: “Lorsqu'une vie ne se compose que d'action et de mouvement, tout est bientôt dit; mais quand elle s'est passée dans les régions les plus élevées de l'âme, son histoire est diffuse” (p. 645).

In the portrayal of character Balzac relies largely on a principle which is derived from the theories of Lavater, for whom he had a most profound respect. Lavater holds that the character of man is revealed, not only by his features, but by his dress, his house, his furniture, all his *milieu*: the little nook of the world in which he fits and which he shapes to suit himself reacts in turn upon him until it becomes his very image¹.

Balzac stoutly defended these theories, and in applying them he arranged so admirably the *milieu* of his characters that their psychological weakness hardly appears. They fit so naturally into the scheme of things that they seem to be a part of it; remove Madame Vauquier from her *pension* and she becomes a mere shadow. We are inclined at times to believe that Balzac would deny the existence of individual psychology, holding that a man's mind works by fixed laws according to the influences of his surroundings; and it is doubtless true that the author's materialistic conceptions hindered him from developing any extended psychological facility.

But, strange as it may at first seem, it is the inner man that interests Balzac primarily. His purpose is to paint souls, and even to go beyond the sphere of the ordinary psychological

1. Johann Caspar Lavater: *Essai sur la Physiognomonie*. La Haye, 1783-1803, Vol. I, p. 27; cf. F. Baldensperger, “Les Théories de Lavater dans la littérature française,” in *Études d'histoire littéraire*, 2^e série.

novel, to paint them in their deepest and most spiritual expressions: in a word, he aspires to metaphysics. And so, when he begins an extended description of physical objects, he is careful to tell us that it is necessary for the proper understanding of the drama which is to follow. From this external shell he believes he can penetrate to the germ of life within, as he tells us in the opening page of *Facino Cane*: "Chez moi l'observation était déjà devenue intuitive, elle pénétrait l'âme sans négliger le corps; ou plutôt elle saisissait si bien les détails extérieurs, qu'elle allait sur-le-champ au delà; elle me donnait la faculté de vivre de la vie de l'individu sur laquelle elle s'exerçait." He tries to project within the soul his vision for externals, and in doing so he is departing from the realm of observation for that of imagination. Imagination is the mother of figures, and so we are not surprised to hear Valentine say in the *Peau de chagrin*: "L'exercice de la pensée, la recherche des idées, les contemplations tranquilles de la science nous prodiguent d'ineffables délices, indescriptibles comme tout ce qui participe de l'intelligence, dont les phénomènes sont invisibles à nos sens extérieurs. Aussi sommes-nous toujours forcés d'expliquer les mystères de l'esprit par des comparaisons matérielles" (p. 81).

While we are discussing the figures resulting from the substitution of imagination for observation, it is well to note also that often the whole character is largely a product of imagination, which plays a much larger part in the work of Balzac than we are sometimes inclined to admit. He is far from the note-book method of his naturalistic followers, a method which limits the operation of the imagination and especially that phase of imagination that results in figurative creation. As has frequently been stated, it would have been a physical impossibility for Balzac to observe with the minuteness of a Zola or a Goncourt the two thousand characters that he created and followed through the vicissitudes of life; the great amount of his production, the endless correction and reworking, his financial obligations and adventures, his social duties would

not have left him the time. Gautier is the first, I believe, to use in connection with him the very fitting term *voyant*¹. What he observes in his hurried contact with life is merely a starting point for his imagination ; it may lie dormant in his brain for years, fermenting, as it were. He claims to be able to reconstruct a whole human being from a single trait, just as Cuvier reconstructed an extinct animal from a single bone. Thus Camille Maupin bears but little resemblance to her model, George Sand. Similarly such characters as Rastignac, Valentin, Félix de Vandernes, and Louis Lambert are evidently in part biographical², yet a close study shows comparatively few concrete similarities. Similar instances might be cited for other authors, especially of the romantic period ; only the method differs. We may have a narrative following closely the facts, with some of the ugly spots gilded over, as in the *Confession d'un enfant du siècle* ; we may have an idealisation as in *Graziella*, or a symbol as in *Faust*. Balzac's method seems to have been to start from some characteristic, passion, aspiration, or circumstance in his own life, which he isolates, surrounds with the necessary elements of a separate existence, and carries mercilessly to its logical conclusion. In the person of Louis Lambert, whom he handles with more genuine delicacy and comprehending tenderness than his other characters, we seem to see an effort to discover what would have been his fate, if he had continued in the way of the studies that led to the composing of the youthful essay on the will, and eventually to his sickness and removal from the Collège de Vendôme. The story, being but slightly dependant on external events, remains more personal with Balzac than his other quasi-autobiographies, where the character develops in such a way as to be absolutely distinct from the personality of the author ; I might also add that, being largely concerned with psychological phenomena, it abounds in figures of speech.

1. *Portraits contemporains*, p. 63.

2. Cf. the testimony of a friend of Balzac in the years of his literary apprenticeship : Jules de Pétigny in *La France centrale [de Blois]*, March 4, 1855, cited by Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, pp. 377-81.

This ever active imagination, powerful to the extent of approximating hallucination, very naturally translates itself into figures of speech, especially when the idea is one that Balzac found difficult to express literally. Balzac says that "on exprime mieux ce que l'on conçoit que ce que l'on a éprouvé¹," but there is a vagueness about the idealized unknown which is only too evident in the hazy impressions that we receive from his figures dealing with the more poetic characters. The significance is not very clear to us, and we wonder whether Balzac himself had any definite conception of what he wanted to say or whether he justifies the criticism of Taine, who says, apropos of Balzac's criticism of Stendhal's style: "Quand votre idée, faute de réflexion, est encore imparfaite et obscure, ne pouvant la montrer elle-même, vous indiquez les objets auxquels elle ressemble; vous sortez de l'expression courte et directe, pour vous jeter à droite et à gauche dans les comparaisons. C'est donc par impuissance que vous accumulez les images: faute de pouvoir marquer nettement dès la première fois votre pensée, vous la répétez vaguement plusieurs fois, et le lecteur, qui veut vous comprendre, doit suppléer à votre faiblesse ou à votre paresse, en vous traduisant vous-même à vous-même, en vous expliquant ce que vous vouliez dire et ce que vous n'avez pas dit.²"

Taine was strongly under the influence of Stendhal when he wrote this, but it is true that a figure of speech may conceal a thought or the absence of thought; and if the reader himself has no very definite conception of the subject under discussion, he will pass on, content with the mere sound of the words. On the other hand, as Balzac intimates, you cannot describe a man's soul in the same way that you do his body. Words have some of the qualities of a measuring rod when you are dealing with concrete objects; when you are dealing with abstracts, they are elastic, indefinite, personal. A concrete comparison may be an aid; if a woman suggest a flower to

1. *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, I, p. 4.

2. *Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire*, p. 254.

the author, he may hope to reproduce his impression of the woman in the mind of his reader by comparing her to a flower. But it requires an unerring instinct and a poetic delicacy to choose always the proper comparison, and to suppress or hold in the background those qualities of the physical object that do not harmonize with the impression desired.

On the other hand, a figure of speech is certainly not the only solution for the problem, and the fact that Stendhal, who is primarily a psychologist, rarely departs from literal expression would indicate that it is not the most natural solution, that its use is really a sign of weakness or uncertainty of analysis. Stendhal is perfectly at ease with abstract ideas ; he analyses the emotions and thoughts of his characters in their origins, development, and effects, until the soul seems to be laid bare as by a scalpel. An interesting comparison can be made between Flaubert and Balzac, both of whom had a physical rather than an intellectual vision. It goes without saying that neither abstains entirely from abstract analysis ; Flaubert resorts occasionally also to concrete comparisons, but his most typical method seems to be that noted by Bourget : " Il considéra qu'une tête humaine est une chambre noire où passent et repassent des images de tous ordres : images des milieux jadis traversés qui se représentent avec une portion de leur forme et de leur couleur ; images des émotions jadis ressenties qui se représentent avec une portion de leur délice ou de leur amertume... Pour Flaubert, . . . décomposer scientifiquement le travail d'une tête humaine, c'est analyser ces images qui affluent en elle, démêler celles qui reviennent habituellement et le rythme d'après lequel elles reviennent ! " In other words, Flaubert lays bare the soul of the character in a certain situation by making him think aloud, by describing the images, usually physical, that present themselves to his mind. The thoughts and images, taken in connection with the situation, give a very definite impression of the mental attitude of the character.

1. *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, 1, pp. 163 ff.

As for our author, we find Félix de Vandernesse trying to explain what he feels by such a succession of figures as : " Je ne saurais expliquer dans quel état je fus en m'en allant. Mon âme avait absorbé mon corps, je ne pesais pas, je ne marchais point, je volais. Je sentais en moi-même ce regard, il m'avait inondé de lumière, comme son *Adieu, monsieur !* avait fait retentir en mon âme les harmonies que contient l'*O filii, ô filiae !* de la résurrection pascale. Je naissais à une nouvelle vie. J'étais donc quelque chose pour elle ! Je m'endormis en des langes de pourpre. Des flammes passèrent devant mes yeux fermés en se poursuivant dans les ténèbres comme les jolis vermissaux de feu qui courrent les uns après les autres sur les cendres du papier brûlé. Dans mes rêves, sa voix devint je ne sais quoi de palpable, une atmosphère qui m'enveloppa de lumière et de parfums, une mélodie qui me caressa l'esprit " (LV., p. 446). Such seems to be Balzac's favorite method of depicting the *état d'âme* of his characters, a method that results from a certain incapacity for abstract psychological analysis.

III

RELATION OF FIGURES TO AN ATTITUDE OF MIND

This concrete expression of abstracts is, however, only a phase of the general materializing tendency in the figures. By materialistic I mean, not necessarily the opposite of poetic, but the opposite of idealistic, for, as I have stated before, a figure may be materialistic and poetic at the same time. We find in Balzac very few personifications, and those few show little originality ; there are comparatively few comparisons between things on the same plane ; but the figure of speech is persistently employed to express the human attributes in terms of the animal, plant, and material worlds. In this great predominance of realistic figures we can see a reflexion of the realistic attitude of mind. The realist claims to depict life as it is, but in spite of all the theories to the contrary, it is evident

that really normal life is an unsatisfactory subject for literature : there must be a certain amount of exaggeration, which with the realist takes the form of the insistence on the *bête humaine*. His aim is to assume the attitude of the impartial, impersonal observer, putting nothing of himself in the picture that he paints. Humanity becomes a mere complex organism, a set of cogs whose operations and functions he is to observe and explain ; the attention is centered on those phases of human life that are most easily seen, understood, and described : the animal and material side of man's existence. The more spiritual elements are subordinated to the external, in the terms of which they find expression.

When the realist uses figures of speech to express himself, we are justified in expecting just such figures as we find in Balzac : the expression of abstract qualities in terms of what can be seen and felt, the simplification of complex human nature by making it conform to vegetable existence or to the simple psychology of the lower animals. Even when the romantic side of Balzac's nature is uppermost and he tries to idealize his characters, there is little change in this materialistic tendency, which represents the fundamental bent of his mind and imagination : the poetry in the *Lys dans la vallée* is so covered with the dust of earth as to be hardly recognizable.

When mention is made of figurative imagination, the name of Victor Hugo naturally suggests itself. Thanks to M. Iluguet's study of Victor Hugo's metaphors, a comparison of his figures with those of Balzac is comparatively simple, and we cannot do better than to quote Huguet's conclusions concerning the general tendency of Hugo's imagination : " D'autre part, nous avons vu comment il donne à tout la vie, et même la volonté, reconnaissant dans les antres des bouches qui crient ou qui bâillent, dans les branches des bras tendus, dans les ronces des griffes méchantes. Comment n'aurait-il pas l'idée de donner à toutes les forces de la nature, avec la volonté, l'intelligence ? [He is attempting to explain the frequent comparison by Victor Hugo of crude nature to the products of human art.] L'océan,

la goutte d'eau, le vent, et même des abstractions, le temps, le hasard, ne peuvent-ils devenir des artistes dont la collaboration tantôt patiente, tantôt brutale, mais toujours infatigable, met des milliers d'années à produire de prodigieux chefs-d'œuvre ? L'océan n'est pas toujours la gueule qui dévore le navire, il est aussi la main qui sculpte, ciselle et polit le rocher¹. " — " On sait comment tout s'anime dans l'imagination de Victor Hugo : la vague, la nuée, le rocher, l'arbre, la fleur. On sait comment partout il distingue les formes et les mouvements de l'homme et de l'animal². " — " Toujours obsédé par l'idée du mystère, des liens invisibles entre tous les êtres, il cherche partout des symboles, la manifestation de rapports que l'intelligence humaine peut tout au plus soupçonner. Ajoutons à cela cette vie consciente qu'il prête volontiers à tout, ... son habitude de comparer l'activité des forces de la nature à l'activité de l'homme, d'admirer la richesse inépuisable de l'univers, la prodigalité qui remplit de diamants l'espace infini sans oublier d'en suspendre un à l'extrémité du brin d'herbe³. " — " Mais surtout, ce ciel est vivant. Les astres n'éclairent pas le vide, l'indifférent, l'inconscient. Ce sont des flambeaux qui, comme ceux de nos maisons, éclairent la vie et l'activité. Ce sont des yeux qui nous observent, etc⁴. "

Of the figures cited in Huguet's two volumes, substantially all will fall into one of the following three classes :

1) Comparisons between physical objects suggested by external similarities of form and color. In these we note a persistent tendency to compare the crude and natural to a product of human art, a tendency which we have seen expressed in a few figures of the *Lys dans la vallée*.

2) The animations of nature.

3) Comparisons based on a symbolic interpretation of the

1. Huguet, *Le sens de la forme dans les métaphores de Victor Hugo*, p. 299.

2. Huguet, *La couleur, la lumière et l'ombre dans les métaphores de Victor Hugo*, p. 59.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

second term. Some of these correspond externally to the materialistic comparisons of Balzac ; but, by the choice of the comparison and the manner of expression, the concrete concept with Hugo loses its material significance and becomes a pure symbol of an abstract idea, so that the actual concrete expression of an abstract concept is largely neutralized. This group would include a great many figures which are not included in Huguet's classification, such as the representation of conscience as "*la boussole de l'inconnu*" or "*la colonne vertébrale de l'âme.*"

Such a use of the figure of speech corresponds to certain romantic tendencies. Prepossessed with his ego, the romanticist infuses his own nature, not only into his characters, but into inanimate objects, which he tries to elevate, to bring nearer to himself. Artistic exaggeration with him is idealistic rather than materialistic. He loves nature because he has breathed life into her, and the sympathy that he receives from her is but a return of what he has given. He sees things colored by his own personality and they tend to become alive, more intimately associated with human activities, or symbolic of higher truths. He sees man and God in nature, whereas the realist sees nature in man.

The comparison I have drawn between Balzac and Victor Hugo becomes dangerous if we attempt to draw from it definite generalizations, but it is suggestive to any one who is trying to formulate Balzac's relation to the romantic school. By the side of the idealistic figures, you will find in the works of Victor Hugo as many if not more materialistic figures, from which, being a great poet, he obtains poetic effects ; but the proportion is much smaller than in Balzac, nor do we find in them the most striking of his figurative creations as is the case with Balzac. But the fact that the idealistic figures are almost negligible in Balzac would indicate that, in spite of his many romantic traits, he lacks a certain attitude towards nature which is characteristic of the romantic authors from Rousseau on, and which finds such a striking manifestation in the figures

of Victor Hugo. There is a corresponding difference when we consider the characters. The romanticist infused his own nature into his creations, and his various characters were really one and the same. Only the conditions changed. This sameness within the individual author is extended to the groups, so that we speak of the romantic hero as of a single type. Such a process is the exception with Balzac. His ego is continually obtruding itself in his work, but it is either distinct from or subordinate to the characters. While the romanticists raised their characters up to their idealized selves, Balzac attained a similar result, without impairing his creative power, by lowering himself as it were to the plane of those whom he described. He had the dramatic power of putting himself in their places, living their lives and thinking their thoughts. Balzac had a susceptible nature, and, being subjected to the same general influences as the romantic authors, he could hardly escape sharing some of their traits, but the fundamental cast of his mind is almost wholly realistic. He is related to the romantic school rather by emotional traits and superficial literary artifices.

CHAPTER VI

RELATION BETWEEN BALZAC'S FIGURES AND HIS IDEAS

In his article on Stendhal, Balzac distinguished three types of contemporary literature : "la littérature des images," chiefly lyric, represented by Hugo, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Senancour, Gautier and others ; "la littérature des idées," dealing largely with facts and headed by Stendhal, Musset and Mérimée ; and "l'éclectisme littéraire," a combination of the two — "le lyrisme et l'action, . . . les images et les idées, l'idée dans l'image ou l'image dans l'idée." This last school, in which he places Scott, Cooper, Madame de Staël, and George Sand, is his own, for : "Je ne crois pas la peinture de la société moderne possible par le procédé sévère de la littérature du XVII^e et du XVIII^e siècle. L'introduction de l'élément dramatique; de l'image, du tableau, de la description, du dialogue me paraît indispensable dans la littérature moderne¹." This analysis, true in its general outlines, is especially apt in so far as it concerns Balzac himself, for in his work we find a striking mingling of emotion and ideas, of imagination and facts. We are interested here in his powerful imagination and his abundance of ideas, for, as he himself intimates, both ideas and imagination find expression in the figures of speech.

If we examine the figures of Victor Hugo, we find that they reduce themselves in large measure to what we may call pure imagery plus imagination ; in other words the external appearance of objects plays a most important part in his figurative creation, which consists frequently in the mere association of two concrete images ; and, when imagination enters to any considerable extent, it is as pure imagination, which seeks a more subtle, fanciful, or symbolic criterion of comparison. Both processes may be illustrated by a beautiful figure in the

1. *Oeuvres*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 687 ff.

Chants du crépuscule (N° XIV) : a drop of water glistening in the sunlight at the end of a blade of grass is a pearl ; when it falls it is mud. This striking contrast, the contamination of perfect purity, he relates to woman, who also is "perle avant de tomber et fange après la chute." Ideas, to be sure, are not absent from such a comparison, but the association of ideas which produces the figure results entirely from the operation of the imagination.

On the other hand, the figures of Balzac are usually the result of the fusion at white heat of imagination and ideas : his comparisons often result from certain ideas, and in turn they seem to confirm and develop these same ideas, to impose them more powerfully on the mind of Balzac : in fact it seems at times that the idea really originates in a banal figure. This fusion of imagery and ideas is dangerous, for the one is likely to be distorted to make it conform to the other, and with Balzac, as we shall see, it is usually the figure of speech that suffers in its subordination to the idea. Moreover, in order that a comparison should be effective, its meaning should readily be grasped by the reader, and, when it is based on a conception with which he is unfamiliar, it is sure to appear false and ridiculous.

We come now to a detailed study of the relation of ideas to figures, using our table¹ as a guide. It is well to note here that the fact that such a classification as is there made should be so simple, and at the same time so nearly complete, is in itself an indication that there must be some clearly defined underlying principles which cause the figures to fall into these distinct groups. For our present purpose the *Lys dans la vallée* is especially interesting, for, being intimately associated in the mind of the author with the *Études philosophiques*, it offers a most striking example of the fusion of ideas and imagination. Also in the figures of speech and in other manifestations of the same influences that produced them, we find an explanation for the miscarriage of this favorite child of Balzac's

1. See *supra*, Chapter I.

brain. We must get beneath the mere statement of materialism and natural indelicacy, for, from a certain point of view, he seems especially fitted for writing such a work. There is much in his nature that strikes us as poetic: he idealizes purity; always prepossessed with the feminine, he places woman just below the angels and worships her; in his letters, especially the earlier ones, he shows considerable delicacy of appreciation. Strange as it may seem, in a romanesque novel of his youth such as *Argou le Pirate*, where neither ideas nor figures played any important part, we find a young woman who, while resembling in many ways Eugénie Grandet, through all her adventures retains more real feminine charm and delicacy.

When we approach the question of Balzac's system of thought, we note at once a dominant principle expressed in literature, science and philosophy: the unity of creation — a principle which appears under various aspects in the romantic philosophy, and one which, even considered abstractly, encourages figurative creation; for, if things have so many points of resemblance as to be conceived of as a single whole, a multitude of comparisons immediately present themselves to the mind. One of the happiest moments in Balzac's life was when he conceived the idea of joining all his works into a magnificent whole, and he always protested against their being judged on their individual merits. Also he would have humanity conform to the animal world, for, as he states in the *Avant-propos*: "Il n'y a qu'un animal." This idea he develops in the *Études philosophiques* under the influence of Swedenborg, to show that man is but an intermediate stage of development between the animal and the angel. He may live on earth and partake largely of the nature of either; he may like Seraphita become so spiritualized that he loses practically all human traits even before he breaks the bonds of mortality and takes his place among the angels. Similarly the *Recherche de l'absolu* is based on the principle of the unity of the material world. All of these conceptions which floated vaguely in the

minds of others seemed to assume in the mind of Balzac a concrete or mathematical form. They were not theories, but facts capable of scientific and artistic application.

The relation of this general theory to the figures in Group I, as analyzed in Chapter II, is evident. Thirty odd of the comparisons of man to man consist in the substitution of a divine conception for a terrestrial one. Madame de Mortsauf is a sister of charity, a martyr, a saint, or even the deity. Félix offers his love as a priest at an altar; he drinks the tears of Henriette as he would drink the blood of Christ at the holy communion. Naturally, I did not list the mere references to Henriette as an angel, for the idea is so banal that it is almost impossible to revive the figure; in the *Lys dans la vallée* the word *ange* almost supplants *femme* and is used as if it were entirely literal. Altogether there is a distastefully insistent confusion of the carnal and the spiritual emotions. On the other hand, the comparison to animals is equally insistent, in accord with the theory of Balzac that " *l'homme est composé de matière et d'esprit : l'animalité vient aboutir en lui et l'ange commence à lui*"¹.

The less frequent conception of the conformity of human and plant life is elaborated in twenty-seven figures; comparisons to physical objects, while expressing the same tendency, are more commonplace and more natural, because they are usually based on evident and purely external similarities.

But more striking still is the manner in which Balzac relates the spiritual world to the physical and material, which may be explained by an examination of some of the specific formulations of his theories.

Throughout all of Balzac's novels and correspondence we note a constant and absorbing interest in the sciences. He read widely, consulted living authorities, observed, and — what is more significant — he pondered and theorized for himself². His special inclination was towards the semi-sciences,

1. *Lys dans la vallée*, p. 369; cf. *Les proscrits*, pp. 672-73.

2. Cf. Cabanès, *Balzac ignoré*, especially the later chapters.

the various forms of occultism and mysticism. Theories such as those of his beloved Lavater, Gall, and Mesmer naturally produce materialistic conceptions : if the sentiments, desires and passions of a man can transform his body, that is, if they produce physical reactions, they are readily conceived of as possessing physical attributes. If ideas may be transmitted from one mind to another, or if the will of one man may be imposed on another by a mysterious force which we call animal magnetism, then the idea or the will must have a distinct if not a material existence of its own. Balzac was especially interested in these subjects in his early years, when he wrote most of his *Études philosophiques*. They find very definite expression in *Louis Lambert*, from which I shall give a series of typical quotations : "Ici-bas, tout est le produit d'une SUBSTANCE ÉTHÉRÉE, base commune de plusieurs phénomènes connus sous les noms impropres d'électricité, chaleur, lumière, fluide galvanique, magnétique, etc. L'universalité des transmutations de cette substance constitue ce qu'on appelle vulgairement la matière... Le cerveau est le matras où l'ANIMAL transporte ce que, suivant la force de cet appareil, chacune de ses organisations peut absorber de cette SUBSTANCE, et d'où elle sort transformée en volonté. La volonté est un fluide" (p. 96) ; "Chimistes de la volonté" (p. 35) ; "La volonté pouvait, par un mouvement tout contractile de l'être intérieur, s'amasser ; puis, par un autre mouvement, être projetée au dehors..., réagir sur les autres..., les pénétrer d'une essence étrangère à la leur" (p. 43) ; "La volonté s'exerce par des organes vulgairement nommés les cinq sens qui n'en sont qu'un seul, la faculté de voir" (p. 96) ; "Le son, la couleur, le parfum et la forme ont une même origine... La pensée qui tient à la lumière s'exprime par la parole, qui tient au son... La colère, comme toutes nos expressions passionnées, est un courant de la force humaine qui agit électriquement" (p. 97) ; "L'attente... n'est si douloureuse que par l'effet de la loi en vertu de laquelle le poids d'un corps est multiplié par sa vitesse" (p. 45).

The idea, briefly stated, is that there is but one substance,

that all forms of matter, all forces that act on matter, all intellectual and spiritual attributes of man are really one and the same, the only difference being of quantity and condition of stability or movement. Hence will, or thought, or passion is only another form of fluidity, light, or sound. The question arises as to how much of this Balzac really believed. His sister states that he put in the mouth of Louis Lambert many of his own opinions that were too advanced for personal expression¹. The same ideas appear in his antecedent and his subsequent work. He speaks in his own name in *Ursule Mirouet*: "La science des fluides impondérables, seul nom qui convienne au magnétisme, si étroitement lié par la nature de ses phénomènes à la lumière et à l'électricité... La phrénologie et la physiognomonie, la science de Gall et celle de Lavater, qui sont jumelles, dont l'une est à l'autre ce que la cause est à l'effet, démontrent aux yeux de plus d'un physiologiste les traces du fluide insaisissable, base des phénomènes de la volonté, et d'où résultent les passions, les habitudes, les formes du visage et celles du crâne" (p. 55). A priest seeking to explain a dream of Ursule says: "Si les idées sont une création propre à l'homme, si elles subsistent en vivant d'une vie qui leur soit propre, elles doivent avoir des formes insaisissables à nos sens extérieurs, mais perceptibles à nos sens intérieurs quand ils sont dans certaines conditions. Ainsi les idées de votre parrain peuvent vous envelopper" (p. 192).

We are forced to the conclusion that, if Balzac did not believe in his theories, he at least thought he did, for he expresses them here as a science that will complete if not replace the existing sciences, and is very positive in his affirmations in a letter to Dr. Moreau on the receipt of the latter's book on *Le Génie et la folie*². The extreme form of his ideas results partly from his mania for logical explanation, which appears so frequently in his work and which is the fundamental principle of his psychological studies. His mind intuitively

1. *Oeuvres*, Vol. XXIV, p. xlvi.

2. Cited by Cabanès, *Balzac ignoré*, p. 216.

seeks a plausible solution for the mysterious workings of thought and passion, and, when it fails him, his imagination begins to work, or, to be more exact, imagination and intellect work side by side. It seems more than probable that the former seized upon such expressions as *le feu de l'amour*, *le feu d'un regard*, and *épancher sa tendresse*, which, in the form of the concrete image evoked by the banal figure, reacted on the mind of Balzac and gave form to his vague conceptions ; for Balzac really invents very few comparisons, and his boldest figures are merely detailed developments of the idea expressed in the most banal figures of every-day speech. We have already seen his views on the evoking power of words ; we know also that in real life he had only to let his mind dwell upon an idea in order to be convinced of its truth. Gautier says of him : " L'idée était si vive qu'elle devenait réelle en quelque sorte ; parlait-il d'un dîner, il le mangeait en le racontant ; d'une voiture, il en sentait sous lui les moelleux coussins et la traction sans secousse ! "

Thus the figures are not mere suggestions of symbolic significance, but have a logical basis of similarity ; for, even if Balzac in his saner moments would laugh at his theories, he had at least conceived of them as realities, and the figures must represent the existence or the reminiscence of a concrete image. The reaction of theory on figure and of figure on theory had continued until his treatment of humanity is a kind of composite treatise on botany, zoology, physiology, hydraulics, optics, mechanics, etc. Notice in the following passage from *Louis Lambert* the multitude of forms in which the conception 'idea' presents itself to his mind :

" Tout à coup une idée s'élance, passe avec la rapidité de l'éclair à travers les espaces infinis dont la perception nous est donnée par notre vue intérieure. Cette idée brillante, surgie comme un feu follet, s'éteint sans retour : existence éphémère, pareille à celle de ces enfants qui font connaître aux parents une joie et un chagrin sans bornes ; espèce de fleur mort-née

1. *Portraits contemporains*, p. 90.

dans les champs de la pensée. Parfois l'idée, au lieu de jaillir avec force et de mourir sans consistance, commence à poindre, se balance dans les limbes inconnus des organes où elle prend naissance ; elle nous use par un long enfantement, se développe, devient féconde, grandit au dehors dans la grâce de la jeunesse et parée de tous les attributs d'une longue vie ; elle soutient les plus curieux regards, elle les attire, ne les lasse jamais : l'examen qu'elle provoque commande l'admiration que suscitent les œuvres longtemps élaborées. Tantôt les idées naissent par essaim, l'une entraîne l'autre, elles s'enchaînent, toutes sont agaçantes, elles abondent, elles sont folles. Tantôt elles se lèvent pâles, confuses, déperissent faute de force ou d'aliments ; la substance génératrice manque. Enfin, à certains jours, elles se précipitent dans les abîmes pour en éclairer les immenses profondeurs ; elles nous épouvantent et laissent notre âme abattue. Les idées sont en nous un système complet, semblable à l'un des règnes de la nature, une sorte de floraison dont l'iconographie sera retracée par un homme de génie qui passera pour un fou peut-être. Oui, tout, en nous et au dehors, atteste la vie de ces créations ravissantes que je compare à des fleurs, en obéissant à je ne sais quelle révélation de leur nature. Leur production comme fin de l'homme n'est d'ailleurs pas plus étonnante que celle des parfums et des couleurs dans la plante. Les parfums sont des idées peut-être" (p. 44).

The central thought is that ideas have a distinct though dependent existence, and the comparison that dominates throughout the passage is that of a child in its birth and development. But, interwoven in this minutely developed metaphor, we have other terms applied, such as *feu follet*, *fleur*, *jaillir*, *poindre*, *œuvres*, *essaim*, *éclairer*, *système*, *floraison* and *parfums*. The passage offers a most interesting example of the fusion of science and imagination and of the class of figure that is likely to result from such a fusion.

In the *Lys dans la vallée* we find Balzac still obsessed by the ideas upheld so stoutly in *Louis Lambert*; but in the *Lys*

dans la vallée we have not the scientific expression of theories, but figures of speech which reflect those theories in the choice of the comparisons. An examination of the table will show to what extent the imagination of Balzac was influenced by his semi-scientific conceptions. It is not necessary to dwell on the figures drawn from fluids and flames. They have already been analysed¹, and their relation to what has been said is sufficiently evident. It would naturally be impossible to deduce from each figure a definite scientific conception, but on the other hand Balzac's scientific theories are themselves more than hazy. In theory and figure we find the same attitude of mind and the same channels of thought. In both we find the elaboration of the idea expressed frequently in banal metaphors; this is especially true as regards flame or fire, which appear in various every-day expressions denoting thought, truth, joy, love, anger, despair, or pain. Balzac as a rule merely elaborates and intensifies. The assimilation of the spiritual to the physiological side of man, shown in eighty-three figures, is one of the most fundamental ideas of Balzac and one of his most common literary devices. It is the underlying principle of the citations I have given from *Louis Lambert* and *Ursule Mirouet*. The very numerous comparisons to flowers do not seem to depend on any definitely formulated theory; they seem rather to be used because the idea is essentially a poetic one, which Balzac thought he could make still more poetic by elaborating it and carrying it out in detail. Throughout the whole book he is obsessed by this flower motif, which in the other novels is relatively infrequent. It is evidently a case of auto-intoxication, produced probably by the very title of the book. It is interesting in this connection to compare some of the expressions which Balzac uses in his letters in speaking of Madame de Berny, on whom he modeled the character of Madame de Mortsau. There are two that are especially striking by their similarity to figures already quo-

1. *Supra*, pp. 19-20.

ted from the *Lys dans la vallée*: "A tout moment la mort peut m'enlever un ange qui a veillé sur moi pendant quatorze ans, une fleur de solitude aussi, que jamais le monde n'a touchée et qui était mon étoile"¹ (cf. the mixed figure "une fleur sidérale," LV., p. 437, and others); "Madame de B...., qui, de son côté, penche la tête comme une fleur dont le calice est chargé d'eau"² (cf. "Penchant la tête comme un lys trop chargé de pluie," LV., p. 573).

Let us study a little more closely the artistic result of this fusion of ideas and imagination in the *Lys dans la vallée*. The novel is related in the mind of Balzac to the *Études philosophiques* and especially resembles *Séraphita*, Madame de Mortsau being a woman only a little less idealized and spiritualized than Séraphita. The purpose of a majority of the figures in the *Lys dans la vallée*, then, is to idealize, to produce a poetical impression, but his scientific theories dominate, glide in and spoil the effect. It is not only that the figures conform to the realistic tendency towards the concrete expression of the abstract and the comparison of higher to lower life. Though this is opposed to the elevating tendency of the figurative creations of romantic idealism, such comparisons as a woman to a flower or passion to a rushing wave are frequently used with poetic effect. But they must be used with discretion as regards number and form; one must be content to dwell lightly on actual similarities, to confine one's self to a comparison of the abstract qualities present in both terms, or to imbue the material object with symbolic significance. Balzac, by introducing too many physical details into his figures, destroys the poetic as well as the idealistic impression which he intended to produce. Take, for instance, the very pretentious comparison of the soul to a flower, by which Félix begins the story of his life. It represents the roots as reaching down into the domestic soil and finding only hard stones, the first leafage as stripped off by *des mains haineuses*, and the flowers as killed

1. *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, Vol. I, p. 220.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

by the frost just as they are beginning to open (LV., p. 394). All this is logical and is exhaustively analytic, but it is not poetical.

Such expressions result from the clearness with which Balzac visualized his comparisons. Even when we meet, in the midst of real figures, such a banal expression as : "Après le soupir naturel aux cœurs purs au moment où ils s'ouvrent" (LV., p. 453); we cannot but think that this bit of dubious psychology may owe its origin to the association of a mournful sound with something that opens—a door or an oyster. When Félix tells of waiting long and patiently in the presence of Madame de Mortsau, he says : "J'avais toujours l'espérance de trouver un moment où je me glisserais dans son cœur... J'avais fini par entendre en elle des remuevements d'entrailles causés par une affection qui voulait sa place" (LV., 444-45); here Balzac, manifestly, is conceiving of love as something which, excluded from its rightful place in the heart of Madame de Mortsau, disturbs the other organs in its frantic efforts to gain admission.

We have already remarked that figures based on unfamiliar scientific conceptions are likely to become obscure and ridiculous. Thus the basal conception of a figure may be so evident to the mind of Balzac that he does not realize the necessity of indicating it for the benefit of his readers. In describing Lady Dudley, he says : "Son corps ignore la sueur, il aspire le feu dans l'atmosphère et vit dans l'eau sous peine de ne pas vivre" (LV., p. 368). A veritable Chinese puzzle, the solution of which, however, seems to be later suggested on the same page, where Lady Dudley is compared to an African desert, and then contrasted to Madame de Mortsau : "L'orient et l'occident : l'une attirant à elle les moindres parcelles humides pour s'en nourrir ; l'autre exsudant son âme, enveloppant ses fidèles d'une lumineuse atmosphère." The basis of both is evidently the conception of the emotions and passions as fluids and flames. Madame de Mortsau exudes her soul in a sort of liquid flame for the use of others ; while Lady Dudley takes and gives

nothing in return, she replenishes her flaming passion from without and must live in an atmosphere humid with the emotions of others in order to satisfy that passion. To be complete, Balzac adds that her very body does not perspire, thus affirming the interrelation of the physiological and spiritual natures.

Such expressions smack too strongly of the earthy to produce the poetic impression that Balzac desired ; he is not satisfied with describing a sentimental reaction by comparing it with the sentiment aroused in the mind by the consideration of a physical object or reaction. When he draws a comparison from a flower, the image takes substance ; he sees the roots and the soil around them, the green of the leaves ; he smells the perfume of the blossoms and sees them glistening with dew, beaten by the rain, bedraggled with mud, dried by the sun and by the lack of sap, or picked to pieces by the birds. Such vision is a gift, it is in this power of evocation that consists the genius of Balzac. But this evocation of material details is suitable only for those works which we call realistic, and, when Balzac comes out of his natural domain and deals with more spiritualized subjects, the concrete evocation necessarily takes on a more figurative aspect. Hence there are more figures, and they are out of harmony with the subject. Balzac seems to be dimly conscious of the contradiction existing between the two phases of his work when he says in *Louis Lambert* : "Peut-être les mots matérialisme et spiritualisme expriment-ils les deux côtés d'un seul et même fait" (pp. 27-28). A justifiable supposition as far as he was concerned; for when you affirm the supremacy of the spiritual side of man, you have to bring it down to the level of matter before you can explain how it can act on and control matter, unless you are content to leave the connection shrouded in mist and calmly say : "I do not know," which Balzac was not content to do. In his world, then, the spiritual may rule, but it is so absolutely the result of physiological and material influences that one seems to see a negation of spiritualism, of soul, and of moral responsibility.

In conclusion, then, the *Lys dans la vallée*, in Balzac's day, was very popular in certain circles, and we still find critics who speak of it as a masterpiece, but the figures, which represent the general tone of the book, are disconcerting to our moral and esthetic sensibilities, being unsuited to the subject. The reason is evidently that Balzac, while constantly urging us to mount the heights with him, is at the same time steeping us in materialism. Furthermore we are often confused by a mingling of incompatible elements, fused into a single figure. One moment a passion is a flower, and the next it is a star, now a liquid and then a flame. The explanation of these defects is to be found in the complete fusion which takes place in the mind of Balzac between his ideas or theories and his imagination, resulting in figures which for Balzac are not mere symbols, but expressions of real similarity or even identity. He fails apparently to distinguish between the literal and the figurative. Such a process of creation was not conducive to the artistry and restraint that the idealized subject demanded.

CHAPTER VII

THE STYLE OF BALZAC, MEASURED BY ITS EFFECTIVENESS

The purpose of this chapter is not primarily to defend the stylistic defects that we have noted and others that have been so often pointed out; it is an attempt to explain certain sensations experienced in reading Balzac, which linger with us and yet which strike us as surprising when, in our more critical moments, we judge him by the ordinary literary standards. Can we say that it is only the content of Balzac's novels that pleases and that the favorable impression is lessened by the style? Is the style a liability and not an asset? Being convinced that the impression produced by the works of Balzac would be impossible if there were not considerable conformity between the style and the subject, if the form and the content were not working to the same end, I have sought to isolate certain elements that offer a psychological explanation of the effect on the reader¹.

In estimating the merits of the various imaginative processes of Balzac, we have already had occasion to broach the subject of this chapter by noting and explaining the impression that is made by the figures; and, as has been seen, such a discussion naturally extends itself at times to a more general consideration of style, since the figures are frequently the most striking and the most concrete manifestations of general stylistic tendencies. The impression made on the reader is a still more complex problem than that of the origin of the style, for another psychological element is introduced. Yet this element must be taken into consideration, for the very term style presupposes an audience: just as there is no sound without a hearer, there is no style unless there is some one to register

1. Cf. Paul Flat, *Seconds essais sur Balzac*, for the same theme treated from a slightly different angle.

the intellectual vibrations conveyed by the words. When a style is felt as good, it means that the author, his age (usually), his subject, and the reader are in unison. An epic from the pen of Ronsard and a play of Molière as read by Renan may be said to lack a necessary element of style which is present in a work of Chapelain in the hands of his contemporaries. As a consequence of these facts, any estimate of the style of an author must be largely personal, in so far as human nature varies. For this reason I cite frequently passages from critics, which, though mere expressions of opinion, are of value when analysed and justified, in that they give us a basis for broader generalizations.

Herbert Spencer¹ holds that the best style is the clearest, the one that requires the least effort on the part of the reader in order to grasp the meaning. About the same idea we find in the comments on style by Buffon², Renan³, and others. Leaving aside the question of literary tradition, such would naturally be the attitude of the philosopher or the man of science, whose interest is centered in the transmission of ideas. The primary function of language is this transmission of abstract conceptions, and the simpler the style the more adequate and unencumbered is its operation on the mind. But the man who would use words to create life and matter has to compete with nature and with the arts that appeal more directly to the senses; he must use language in such a way that its functions are enlarged. The prime requisite in literary creation that aims at the representation of life is that it shall reproduce as vividly as possible in the mind of the reader the emotions, the concepts, and even the physical percepts of the author. If lucidity and beauty can be obtained at the same time, so much the better, but they remain secondary. The purpose is not that the reader should stop and admire the style, but that he should react according to the content.

1. *The Philosophy of Style*.

2. *Discours sur le style*.

3. *Essais de morale et de critique*, p. 341.

The main difficulty is a tendency, especially marked on the part of the hurried modern, to substitute words for ideas. This occurs in his speech as well as in his reading ; it is with phrases that he talks politics and discusses literature and art. An expression which is frequently heard becomes familiar and produces a certain reaction, a vague association of impressions received on former occasions. He does not stop to consider whether he knows the real meaning of the words. In most cases, if pressed for a definition, he would succeed in giving one approximately correct ; but the word is a proxy, and the idea which is never formulated remains in a more or less chaotic state.

Let us take the case of the reader of a piece of smooth correct prose, where every word stands in its proper and logical relation with every other word. The grammatical relations of the words coincide so perfectly with the psychological relations of the ideas that there is little incentive for him to go back of the individual words ; without translating them into definite concepts, it is possible for him to grasp the trend of the idea of the whole. But often this abstract conception that he receives is not real but only a reflection of the words, which disappears soon after the words themselves. Pope solved the difficulty by expressing his ideas in a form that clings to the memory ; a political party or a system of philosophy may have its existence prolonged by the coinage of a happy phrase ; but without the wording the idea merges into that mass of what may be called potential concepts. An exaggerated form of the tendency mentioned is found in the case of a reader whose concentration is poor. He may read a paragraph, aloud even, and at the end have no idea of what he has read. It would seem that the pronunciation was purely mechanical and the words absolutely void of meaning, but for the negative reaction of the mind when the attention is arrested by an unfamiliar word. Moreover, as he goes back to reread the paragraph, the words themselves have a familiar look and sound, showing that the visual and auditory memory was functioning. The same phe-

nomenon is involved when you suddenly realize that you have been hearing a bit of song or verse for years without having any real comprehension of its meaning, as when a verse of the Bible is flooded with significance by personal experience or by merely reading it in a foreign language.

Thus it is possible for the clearest style to be the least effective : it runs so smoothly through the labor-saving machine of our brain that we do not feel the necessity of translating it into definite concepts capable of leaving an impression. Various devices are employed as incentives to this translation of spoken or written thought : the orator has his tone and gestures, the author the mechanical devices of capitals, italics, and paragraphing ; both can use rhetorical devices to focus the attention of the reader or hearer : interrogation, repetition, climax, etc., which are mere external elements of composition ; or antithesis, irony, and hyperbole, which produce a mental reaction in the mind of the reader by making him adjust the statement in order to discover just the shade of meaning which the author wished to convey.

Similar in their effect to these last are the simile and the metaphor, which are, however, much superior, in that they are capable of infinite variety and rejuvenation. Any one of the other figures, being the same wherever you find it, loses quickly its spice of novelty, and by frequent use becomes as ineffective as the mathematical statement. The simile and the metaphor, whose stylistic value we discussed from a slightly different point of view in Chapter III, have the advantage of keeping the mind alert ; they present a difficulty, in solving which the reader becomes active rather than passive, and participates in the mental processes of the author. Take, for instance, the expression of social service as human irrigation. Irrigation does not fit in with our line of thought, our attention is arrested, this word must be translated and assimilated before we can pass on. An image arises : we think of the vast enterprise that is turning the western deserts into flowering gardens ; in order to relate this to social service, the mind

must also produce a definite and detailed image of what the latter means. Then we see that the slums with their infinite possibilities of manhood, undeveloped on account of conditions, are like the deserts, and that the waters which will bring these hidden qualities to the proper flower and fruitage are sanitation, education, economic justice.

A figure, then, unless entirely banal, requires not only that the reader should formulate a mental image, but that he should analyze it sufficiently to find the points of similarity with the object of the comparison. Not only does he use his own faculties to interpret the author's expression, thus impressing the ideas more forcibly on his consciousness, but, if the figure is well chosen, he should be able to grasp the unexpressed ideas of the author or even to go beyond into original creation. Not all the effect is lost, however, if the comparison is only partially apt : the purpose of the figure is usually clear, while on the other hand the reader must call into play his mental faculties and analyze the impression that the author wished to give, before he can pronounce judgment on the propriety of the expression ; thus the idea may be conveyed almost as forcibly as by a more exact expression.

Balzac's figures of speech are merely one manifestation of his desire for a more adequate representation of life. He feels the necessity of something that shall keep the minds of his readers alert ; he writes in a kind of feverish excitement, and he does not want a purely passive reader. Apropos of the *Physiologie du mariage*, he says : " Il me fallait donc envelopper mes idées et les rouler, pour ainsi dire, dans une forme nouvelle, acerbe et piquante, qui réveillât les esprits en leur laissant des réflexions à méditer¹" ; similarly he speaks admiringly of an article of Lucien de Rubempré " écrit dans cette manière neuve et originale où la pensée résultait du choc des mots, où le cliquetis des adverbes et des adjectifs réveillait l'attention². " In this connection a facetious description which

1. *Correspondance*, p. 97.

2. *Illusions perdues*, p. 453.

Balzac gives of his manner of composition is worthy of being cited : "Ce café tombe dans votre estomac . . . ; dès lors tout s'agit : les idées s'ébranlent comme les bataillons de la grande armée sur le terrain d'une bataille, et la bataille a lieu. Les souvenirs arrivent au pas de charge, enseignes déployées ; la cavalerie légère des comparaisons se développe par un magnifique galop ; l'artillerie de la logique accourt avec son train et ses gargousses ; les traits d'esprit arrivent en tirailleurs ; les figures se dressent ; le papier se couvre d'encre, car la veille commence et finit par des torrents d'eau noire, comme la bataille par sa poudre noire."¹ These citations indicate a rather physical conception of the elements of style, a belief that the attention may be aroused by the mere form and juxtaposition of the words. Balzac is ready to use every weapon at his disposal to storm the citadel of his reader's intelligence.

- Many of Balzac's predecessors and contemporaries had felt the need of leaving the traditional paths of composition in the search for a more adequate expression, but Balzac, by his example if not by his theory, remains a pioneer among the greater writers of the nineteenth century ; and, though there is no Balzacian school of style, his influence is evident to one who compares the style of the novel before and after him. In the novel itself, he brought about a great revolution ; he attempted a corresponding revolution in the language², but language, being the common property of the nation and in daily use by every one, is necessarily more bound by tradition than a literary *genre*. To allow an author all the liberties that Balzac wished to take would mean anarchy and chaos, and would defeat the very purpose of language as a medium of intellectual exchange. But when Balzac protested against the inflexibility of language he was voicing an idea which meant a progression and rejuvenation, an idea which was in the air, but which the other great writers were timid about putting into practice ; Balzac

1. *Traité des excitants modernes*, Vol. XX, p. 623.

2. Brunot, in *Petit de Jullerville*, Vol. VIII.

was impelled to do so by the very nature of his genius. In the more artistic styles of Flaubert, Zola, and the Goncourts, we find many of his *procédés*, while on the other hand they have profited by his errors, which showed them certain things to be avoided. But it was Balzac who proved that one may ignore upon occasion the conventionalities of art, esthetics, and language, and at the same time write powerfully and effectively ; and, when we see that so many of his imitators, in smoothing off his rough edges, have lost some of the best traits of his creation, we are tempted to believe with Brunetière that his faults may really be the condition of his genius.

For the style of Balzac can grip even those who are hostile, who struggle against his seduction. We have already cited the case of Sainte-Beuve¹ ; here is an additional testimony in which style is specifically mentioned : “ *Et malgré tout, il y a dans ce style une puissance de sensualisme, plus encore que de réalisme, qui vous domine et vous entraîne, malgré les révoltes du goût.* A travers cette incorrecte et laborieuse prolixité, ces trivialités recherchées, cette affectation du détail ignoble et bas, on sent dans ce style une verve intérieure, intarissable, et dans l'écrivain ce qu'on a si bien appelé *le diable au corps*. Et si *le diable au corps* ne donne à personne ni la grande éloquence, ni la grande poésie, il peut donner, il donne à Balzac, dans tout ce qu'il écrit, je ne sais quelle impérieuse magie et quel prestige qui domptent les esprits les plus rebelles et s'imposent irrésistiblement à la curiosité, sinon à la sympathie². ”

Brunetière, who is more favorably inclined towards Balzac, analyses the causes of his power : “ *Dans le roman comme au théâtre, nous nous sommes aperçus que le style ne consistait essentiellement ni dans une correction dont le mérite, en somme, ne va pas au delà de savoir mettre l'orthographe ; ni dans une facilité, dans une abondance, dans un flux de discours qui finissent — ainsi la prose de George Sand — par donner*

1. *Supra*, p. 50.

2. E. Caro, *Poètes et Romanciers*, p. 358.

la sensation de la monotonie ; ni dans cette écriture artiste qui a fait le désespoir de Flaubert, mais peut-être et uniquement dans le don de faire *vivant*. Ou plutôt encore : faire vivant, voilà, Messieurs, ce que l'artiste moderne se propose avant tout ! C'est là-dessus que nous le jugeons : c'est ce qui assure, en dépit des maîtres d'école, la durée de son œuvre ; et, en ce sens, Messieurs, le style, tel que les grammairiens l'entendent, n'est et ne doit être qu'un moyen... La vie est quelque chose de mêlé, je ne vois pas pourquoi je ne dirais pas quelque chose de trouble. Elle est le mouvement qui " dérange les lignes. " Elle est confusion, désordre, illogisme, irrégularité. Rien n'est plus divers, et rien n'est plus complexe. On l'altère en la simplifiant ; on l'éteint en la fixant. Changer, muer, évoluer, c'en est la définition même. On ne la saisit un moment, on ne nous en donne l'imitation, l'image, la sensation qu'en se faisant soi-même aussi changeant, pour ainsi dire, aussi souple, aussi ondoyant qu'elle. C'est ce que Molière, Saint-Simon, et Balzac ont essayé de faire... C'est aussi l'idée que nous pouvons opposer hardiment à toutes les critiques que l'on a faites ou que l'on fera du style de Balzac¹. "

Judged from this point of view the effectiveness of a style may be even enhanced by its being at times incorrect. Mere perfection is monotonous, insipid like an over-ripe fruit, while the incorrect, as abnormal and unusual, arrests the attention, and, if the meaning is still clear, the impression may be more lasting ; moreover, as Brunetière says, a certain irregularity and confusion gives what might be called an onomatopœic representation of life. But it requires more genius to be unconventional and effective than to be conventional and correct. The incorrect is not something to be imitated, it must grow up out of the nature of the author and the requirements of his subject, it is personal and human, and through being so it is more appealing. Certain idiosyncrasies of language leave gaps through which we can catch glimpses of the author. A sober

1. *Etudes critiques*, Vol. VII, pp. 299-300.

faultless style would give us a very imperfect idea of Balzac, his powerful personality and childlike naïveness, his exuberant imagination which brushes aside all restraints of refinement, his eternally active and self-intoxicating mind, his all-pervasive sensuality — and, after all, Balzac is the most interesting character in the *Comédie humaine*. When we balk at the style, it is really the man that is distasteful to us. To borrow from the philosophy of La Rochefoucauld, perfection may be said to be oppressive, painful to our *amour-propre*; while there is a certain pleasure in being able to pick flaws in genius; they seem to excuse some of our own, and — to be a little more optimistic concerning human nature — they give us more of a fellow-feeling, a more comprehending sympathy for the author. Balzac's excesses in other directions may well result in some measure from his continual use of figures of speech. When you speak of the arms of a tree, the expression is, strictly speaking, incorrect, and the habit of using words in other than their normal sense tends to make one careless about meanings and relations. Balzac came to feel himself a master of language, which he could mould as putty for his purposes; from this feeling of mastery to a tendency to misuse there is but a step.

An idea, intimated by Brunetière in the passage quoted above, is more definitely expressed by Hippolyte Castille : “On lit un roman de M. de Balzac avec ce genre d'intérêt que l'on prend à regarder passer l'émeute dans la rue !.” And we do get something of the impression of dodging through a motley throng on a crowded street, where we see the woman in silks and furs jostling the laborer on his way home from work, the tired office-girl and the giddy searchers after pleasure, the blind beggar and the young couple interested only in themselves; we hear the cry of the newsboy, the metallic notes of the hand-organ, mingled with the rattle of wheels;

1. *La Semaine*, 4 oct. 1846, cited by Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, p. 367.

a pell-mell conglomeration of visual and auditory sensations. For some, such a scene has a strange fascination ; others even find a morbid pleasure in roaming through the centers of poverty, disease, and insanity ; still others prefer the solitude of their rooms or the smooth flow of conventional society. Literary tastes show similar variations. It is true that a man may find pleasure in a book which deals with conditions that would be unbearable to him in real life ; there is something of the lure of the unknown, which is denied external manifestation through pride, convention, physical or esthetic barriers. Balzac goes slumming rather too often, but, when one has read enough of him to get the proper perspective, the general impression is of the plethora of variegated life that throngs the streets at certain hours of the day. The multiplicity and complexity of the impressions received by the author renders his style embarrassed and labored, but this fault, so easily avoided by one who has less to say, ceases to be a fault when it helps to reproduce in the mind of the reader the impression of the author.

We have spoken much of the materialism of Balzac, and not in a laudatory manner, but this very materialism, mixed as it is with a certain amount of idealism, intensifies the illusion of life. A poetic character attracts us, appeals to our better natures, but we are reminded rather of what might be than of what we know to be. We have frequently experienced a shock at the realization that the greatest of men and the most lofty of movements have their material and often repulsive sides ; the more intimate our association with man, the more does his animal nature stand out, for the major portion of our time and energy is absorbed by the concerns of physical existence. On the other hand, we are frequently surprised at the loftiness of the aspirations and ideals which we find permeating the most prosaic of lives. Balzac emphasizes too much the physical and material side, yet he does not neglect the spiritual side, and his men and women, exaggerated as they are, impress us as creatures of flesh and blood and not as abstractions. The

style, laden with materialism, intensifies this impression by an almost physical reaction upon us. In this connection, a citation of a protesting critic is interesting, as an admission that for adequate description the style must partake of the nature of the thing described. In speaking of Balzac's style, Caro says : " Pour le bien définir il faudrait l'imiter... Il a un choix de mots où éclate une sensualité à la fois violente et raffinée, d'une singulière puissance sur l'esprit et d'une contagion presque irrésistible. Si je ne redoutais d'employer ces abominables mots de la science médicale, dont abuse si souvent Balzac, je ne serais pas aussi embarrassé que je le suis pour rendre ma pensée, et je pourrais alors désigner avec précision cette maladie des nerfs qui envahit son imagination tout entière et l'agit convulsivement¹. "

1. E. Caro, *Poètes et Romanciers*, pp. 355 and 364. Other critics frequently use figures similar to these of Balzac, when they attempt to describe his personality and work. Cf. Taine and Gautier, *op. cit.*

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The psychology of style is too delicate and complex a subject to permit of an exhaustive analysis. A complete study of the origin of Balzac's figures would have to take into account every phase of his complex personality, every influence, external or internal, emotional, intellectual, or physical, lasting or momentary, to which he was subjected¹. These elements do not manifest themselves singly ; they combine, they interact, they counteract each other, and the figures, when spontaneous, are formed as naturally as crystals are precipitated from a chemical solution. But in my discussion it has been necessary to isolate the individual elements and treat them as distinct forces ; also the definite statement of a mere tendency, necessary in order to specify and explain it, appears to exaggerate its importance and to minimize the many disturbing and contradictory elements. Confusion will result unless we keep in mind that such an isolation of individual tendencies, though unavoidable, is really artificial ; that they all combine into a complex personality, through the medium of which several may find expression in the same figure of speech. The following con-

1. Note for example such an expression as : " Qui verse à l'heure dû un thé suave, savamment déplié " (LV., p. 569), in which the peculiar use of *déplié* is probably explained by Balzac's thought of his own precious tea, which he kept in paper covered with hieroglyphics, and the unwrapping of which was a kind of ceremony (cf. Léon Gozlan, *Balzac en pantoufles*, p. 42). Similarly the flowers sent him by his friends the Duchesse de Castries and Louise while he was writing the *Lys dans la vallée* may have suggested certain comparisons to him. Five consecutive letters to Louise express thanks for gifts of flowers, three of them mentioning also the *Lys dans la vallée* (cf. *Correspondance*, p. 262 ff.). Also there are the infinite possibilities of literary influence by such men as Rousseau and Chateaubriand. The similarities between the figures of Balzac and those of Rabelais and Saint-Simon result from a similar bent of mind rather than from imitation.

clusions, interpreted in the light of the above statement, may be considered as the result of our study.

The figures of speech form an important element in Balzac's realistic method. In them he attempts to convey more completely and more vividly his own sensations than it would be possible for him to do with conventional French prose. In his attitude towards language he is related to a general liberalistic tendency of his age, and more especially he follows the lead of others with creative powers similar to his own — Rabelais, Molière, and Saint-Simon — who created for themselves a medium suited to what they had to convey. Possessing a vivid imagination which amounts at times almost to hallucination, Balzac is inclined to hold that a word, even abstract, should produce a concrete image in the mind of the reader ; but he realizes also that such is not the case in the faded modern speech. The logical way to induce the formation of a concrete image that will leave a lasting impression is by the simile and the metaphor.

The figures serve also as an outlet for Balzac's sentimental effusions ; by a succession of comparisons he seems to bathe himself voluptuously in certain emotions. Furthermore, he uses the figures as stylistic ornaments. These two tendencies, which are rather romantic traits, are especially evident in the *Lys dans la vallée*.

While the figures are often effective, a universal verdict of excessiveness needs very little restriction when they are judged from an artistic point of view. There are too many figures, they are frequently too pretentious or too materialistic ; as a result partly of these last two traits, we find many comparisons that are not apt or appropriate, and this fact, together with the occurrence of incoherent figures, would indicate an imperfect analysis of the similarities between the two objects compared.

If we seek an explanation for the form of Balzac's figures, other than indelicacy and lack of artistic and critical sense, the following points suggest themselves :

1) Balzac's faculty of losing himself completely in his characters causes him to use expressions that would be natural only as used by a Lousteau or a Bridau whom he is painting ; a strong character tends to set the tone of the book and he influences the expressions even of the other characters.

2) Balzac is primarily interested in the internal workings of the human soul, but not being a psychologist he seizes upon them by an intuitive imagination rather than by observation, and expresses them in terms of something that he can see ; while, on the other hand, physical objects, for which he had an admirable vision, are usually described literally. Thus a large proportion of his figures are concrete expressions of spiritual phenomena, and the indefinite impression that they frequently give is probably due to a vagueness of conception on the part of Balzac. The predominating materialism of the figures is related also to the attitude of mind of the realist who sees the animal and material sides of human nature, in contrast to the romanticist, exemplified by Victor Hugo, in whom we find manifested in the figures of speech a tendency to elevate inanimate nature.

3) The most striking feature of Balzac's figures is the fusion of ideas and imagination which they present and as a result of which they fall into well-defined groups according to the conception underlying the comparisons. There is a continual interaction between the conception and the figure : Balzac seems to visualize concretely certain banal figures and to deduce from them a scientific theory of a real relation between the two concepts compared ; on the other hand, the materialistic conceptions of human nature, expressed in *Louis Lambert* and growing out of Balzac's general theory of the unity of all creation, are constantly finding expression in the figures of the *Lys dans la vallée*, and sometimes the figure is absolutely meaningless unless we trace out its relations to the quasi-scientific theories of the author. The result is an all-pervasive materialism which jars all the more with the poetic pretension of the book on account of the minuteness of the comparisons.

Balzac visualizes the figures so clearly that he fails to distinguish between the figurative and the literal expressions.

In seeking to explain the effect of Balzac on his readers, there are three points in his style that should be considered :

1) The figure of speech forces the reader to formulate a definite image and concept before he can grasp the significance of what is being said ; thus the idea is more forcibly impressed on him than by a piece of smooth conventional prose, where, since the grammatical and logical relations so nearly coincide, there is no incentive for the formation of concrete images for the individual words. Up to a certain point, the style that requires the greatest mental effort to understand may be the most effective for an author whose purpose is not to transmit abstract ideas but to produce an illusion of life, to create.

2) Certain irregularities and confusion of style give a more graphic picture of life by borrowing some of its qualities ; also, being less conventional, more personal, they bring us into more intimate relations with the author.

3) In the same way, materialism of style may aid in giving a more vivid picture of life as we know it ; the impression given is that of the real as opposed to the ideal.

In short, a study of the figures and the style of Balzac shows that they bear an intimate relation to his complex personality and to his subject matter, and that their operation on the reader is largely due to this fact.

In view of what has been said, we may ask ourselves what will be the fate of Balzac at the hands of future generations. It has been pointed out that artistic perfection of style, being largely a matter of convention, lacks a certain personal appeal. But, since the conventions of art are fairly stable in a given race or group of races, this very impersonality gives a more lasting and more universal character to a literary work ; as customs, interests, ideas, and points of view change, the personal appeal of an author is liable to fade, even for those whose cast of mind would naturally incline them to be enthu-

siastic admirers. This is especially true for an author who represents the mind and soul as so intimately bound up with physical existence ; the universal and eternal nature of the manifestations is obscured by the external elements, which, formerly an aid to convincing realization, become a hindrance when the age has grown either less familiar or less interesting. A literary work, in order to endure, should have a universal appeal either as a work of art or as a document of the human soul, hence it is not improbable that the readers of the real Balzac — not of the author of *Eugénie Grandet* or *Le Père Goriot* — will be more and more restricted to those who will overcome prejudice and mental inertia and put themselves as far as possible in the author's world. For such readers the *Comédie humaine* will always offer an unlimited store of riches. The reading of Balzac satisfies a desire for the representation of life, just as, if I may be pardoned for closing with a physiological figure, an itching is relieved by the contact with a roughened surface which even lacerates the skin.

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